מקראות גדולות

The COMMENTATORS' BIBLE

בראשית
GENESIS

THE RUBIN JPS MIQRA'OT GEDOLOT

Edited, translated, and annotated by

MICHAEL CARASIK

מקראות גדולות

The

COMMENTATORS' BIBLE

THE RUBIN JPS MIQRA'OT GEDOLOT

GENESIS בראשית

With the 1917 and 1985 English translations of
the Jewish Publication Society TANAKH*, the questions of Abarbanel,*
the commentaries of Rashi, Rashbam, Ibn Ezra, Nahmanides, and Kimhi,
and selections from the Masorah and from the commentaries of
Bekhor Shor, Hizkuni, Gersonides, Abarbanel, and Sforno

Edited, translated, and annotated by

MICHAEL CARASIK

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Dedicated to our grandchildren

EMMA REBECCA, LEVI SOLOMON, DAVID PHILIP, GIDEON ISAAC, *and* ADDISON MARY

and our future grandchildren.
May they walk in our path and in the paths of our children,

BENJAMIN *and* TALIA, JUSTIN *and* JESSICA, JONAH *and* SARA.

"Loving peace and pursuing peace, loving people, and bringing them closer to the Torah."
Pirkei Avot 1:12

Dedicated to Michael Carasik with הודאה *and* הכרת הטוב.

"One who learns from another a single chapter, a single law, a single verse,
or even a single letter, must treat them with honor."
Pirkei Avot 6:3

You have made Torah knowledge available to us without comparison,
helping us to teach our children and grandchildren, guiding us while we sit in our homes,
walk on our ways, lie down at night, and wake in the morning.
Michael, for you, the publication of Miqra'ot Gedolot Bereshit is the culmination
of many years of research and devotion to the sacred task of unlocking the commentaries
in Miqra'ot Gedolot for us all to read and learn. We hope you enjoy much well-deserved
pride in this formidable accomplishment and that the publication of Bereshit,
the book of beginnings, marks a new beginning for you as you embark on new scholarly
endeavors for the honor of Torah and for the benefit of klal Yisra'el.
May G-d shower his most bountiful blessings on you and your entire family.

JOEL D. *and* TAMMY S. RUBIN

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לזכר נשמת אבי מורי

אורה הירש בן נחמיה

הכ"מ

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CONTENTS

CONVENTIONS AND ABBREVIATIONS *ix*

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS *xi*

WHAT'S ON THE PAGE? *xiv*

Text xiv
Translations xiv
Questions xiv
Major Commentators xiv
Editor's Annotations xv
Additional Commentators xvi

PRINCIPLES OF THE TRANSLATION *xvii*

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS *xix*

THE COMMENTATORS' INTRODUCTIONS *xxi*

THE COMMENTATORS' BIBLE

GENESIS *3*

GLOSSARY *449*

NAMES MENTIONED IN THE TEXT *452*

SOURCE TEXTS *453*

SPECIAL TOPICS *454*

Peshat and Derash 454
Medieval Jewish Philosophy 455
Nahmanides' Mysticism 455
Biblical Hebrew 456

RESOURCES FOR FURTHER STUDY *458*

OTHER ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS *459*

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CONVENTIONS AND ABBREVIATIONS

The commentators always quote the word or phrase on which they will comment from NJPS (the new Jewish Publication Society Bible translation of 1985), with the citation in **bold**. When they quote other biblical phrases, the quotation is either from NJPS, when it is appropriate for the comment, from OJPS (the old JPS translation of 1917), or my own version or revision. When the commentator refers to a particular word in a verse quoted from elsewhere in the Bible, the English translation of that word is *italicized*. In biblical quotations, small caps for LORD (more rarely, GOD) represent the Tetragrammaton (see Glossary). Spellings of biblical names follow NJPS; spellings of other names follow *Encyclopedia Judaica*.

The following conventions are used for biblical references:

v. 6	a verse in the chapter currently being commented on
23:21	a verse from another chapter in Genesis
ch. 2	another chapter in Genesis
Exod. 15:15	verses from elsewhere in the Bible are identified by book, according to the following abbreviations:

Gen. – Genesis	Ezek. – Ezekiel	Ps. – Psalms
Exod. – Exodus	Hosea	Prov. – Proverbs
Lev. – Leviticus	Joel	Job
Num. – Numbers	Amos	Song – Song of Songs
Deut. – Deuteronomy	Obad. – Obadiah	Ruth
Josh. – Joshua	Jon. – Jonah	Lam. – Lamentations
Judg. – Judges	Mic. – Micah	Eccles. – Ecclesiastes
1 Sam. – 1 Samuel	Nah. – Nahum	Esther
2 Sam. – 2 Samuel	Hab. – Habakkuk	Dan. – Daniel
1 Kings	Zeph. – Zephaniah	Ezra
2 Kings	Hag. – Haggai	Neh. – Nehemiah
Isa. – Isaiah	Zech. – Zechariah	1 Chron. – 1 Chronicles
Jer. – Jeremiah	Mal. – Malachi	2 Chron. – 2 Chronicles

Other Abbreviations:

b.	*ben* or *bar,* "son of"
R.	Rabbi
B.	Babylonian Talmud
Y.	Jerusalem (Yerushalmi) or Palestinian Talmud
M.	Mishnah
T.	Tosefta
NJPS	New Jewish Publication Society translation (1985)
OJPS	Old Jewish Publication Society translation (1917)

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Abbreviations for Tractates of Mishnah and Talmuds:

Ar. – Arakhin
Av. Zar. – Avodah Zarah
BB – Bava Batra
Bek. – Bekhorot
Ber. – Berakhot
Bik. – Bikkurim
BK – Bava Kamma
BM – Bava Metzia
Dem. – Demai
Eduy. – Eduyot
Er. – Eruvin
Git. – Gittin
Hag. – Hagigah
Hal. – Hallah
Hor. – Horayot
Hul. – Hullin
Ker. – Keritot
Ket. – Ketubbot
Kid. – Kiddushin
Kil. – Kilayim
Kin. – Kinnim
Ma'as. – Ma'aserot
Ma'as. Sh. – Ma'aser Sheni
Mak. – Makkot
Makhsh. – Makhshirin
Meg. – Megillah
Me'il. – Me'ilah
Men. – Menahot
Mid. – Middot
Mik. – Mikva'ot
MK – Mo'ed Katan
Naz. – Nazir
Ned. – Nedarim
Neg. – Nega'im
Nid. – Niddah
Oho. – Oholot
Or. – Orlah
Par. – Parah
Pes. – Pesahim
RH – Rosh Ha-Shanah
Sanh. – Sanhedrin
Shab. – Shabbat
Shek. – Shekalim
Shev. – Shevi'it
Shevu. – Shevu'ot
Sot. – Sotah
Suk. – Sukkah
Ta'an. – Ta'anit
Tam. – Tamid
Tem. – Temurah
Ter. – Terumah
Toh. – Tohorot
TY – Tevul Yom
Uk. – Uktzin
Yad. – Yadayim
Yev. – Yevamot
Zav. – Zavin
Zev. – Zevahim

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FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What does "Miqra'ot Gedolot" mean?

"Miqra'ot Gedolot" is a Hebrew expression meaning something like "Large-Format Bible" or, more colloquially, "The Big Book of Bible." The famous "Second Rabbinic Bible" of R. Jacob b. Hayyim (1525) was a Miqra'ot Gedolot.

What do you mean "a" Miqra'ot Gedolot? Are there more than one?

Absolutely. There are "Miqra'ot Gedolot" to the Torah or Pentateuch, to the *Megillot* (the Five Scrolls), and to the other biblical books as well. Moreover, the same biblical book can appear in different versions: "Miqra'ot Gedolot" refers to the format, not the contents.

So what is the Miqra'ot Gedolot format?

It consists of the Hebrew biblical text in large print; a "Targum" or translation of the text (in rare cases more than one); and commentaries on the text, often accompanied by explanatory notes. That's why we have titled this English version *The Commentators' Bible*.

Which translation is included in this Miqra'ot Gedolot?

We have included two translations: the old Jewish Publication Society translation of 1917 and the new JPS translation of 1985.

Why include both?

Both were translated by the preeminent Jewish biblical scholars of their day, but the OJPS is more literal and the NJPS freer and more readable. More importantly, the purpose of the Miqra'ot Gedolot is to help explain difficulties in the biblical text. Because translators are often forced to pick a single one of several possible explanations of what the Hebrew text means, comparing two different translations is the best way for someone who doesn't know Hebrew to judge whether there is a difficulty in the original text. Having two translations should also remind you that it is the Hebrew text that is the "real" Bible, not any particular English version.

Which commentaries are included?

We have included the most prominent commentaries of the medieval period—those of Rashi, Rashbam, Ibn Ezra, Kimhi, and Nahmanides—with explanatory notes as well as selected additional comments from other commentators of that era. See "What's on the Page?" below for biographical information about all the commentators.

Is this the first time these commentators have been translated into English?

The five main commentators have all been translated into English before, and some of the other commentators are also beginning to be available.

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Then why are you translating them again?

Previous translations were either made for scholars, assume a high level of Hebrew knowledge, or are literal and difficult to follow.

So this is a free translation?

Yes. First of all, remember that in their original work the commentators quote and comment on the Hebrew text. In this version, they quote instead the NJPS translation and, if they disagree with it, supplement it with the OJPS or with their own understanding of the meaning. Also, since most of us today do not have as thorough a grounding in Jewish sources as did the Hebrew readers of the original commentaries, the commentators must explain things a bit more fully when they "write" in English. For similar reasons, they omit grammatical comments and explanations that are both complicated and extraneous. For a more detailed look at this topic, see "Principles of the Translation" below.

Before I get more involved . . . why should I care about what these medieval commentators think?

About 900 years ago the commentator Rashi told his grandson that new insights into the Bible were being discovered daily. That's still true, which means that if you want the latest biblical scholarship, a modern commentary will serve you better than the comments in this book. But there are some very good reasons to go back to the older commentators, even if you do not share the assumptions they make about the Bible.

The first reason is that the medieval commentators read the Bible very, very carefully. They will often note connections, contradictions, or difficulties that modern readers of the text, especially casual readers, have missed. It can be difficult to think carefully, or deeply, about stories or sayings that you've known since childhood. But the commentators here will help you look at them from a fresh perspective.

The second reason is that the Bible is not a chemical compound that gives the same result every time it is analyzed, but a book that tells a story and describes a way of life. Its stories and teachings call forth different responses in different ages. By reading the various commentaries on a single page, you can see how attitudes toward the Bible changed over the centuries.

The third reason is that the format and nature of this book are geared toward promoting your *active participation* in learning about the Bible, a process that can offer both intellectual and spiritual rewards. The page is set up as a conversation among the commentators, in which the reader is encouraged to join.

The fourth reason, and the most important, is that *The Commentators' Bible* gives you the chance to spend "quality time" with five of the greatest of all Bible commentators, and with half a dozen of their colleagues. Shortly after I began working on the book, a friend asked, "Which of the commentators do you like best?" What he really wanted was to tell me which of them *he* liked best. You too are likely to find, as you read through the book of Genesis, that the commentators will come alive for you, and that one or another of them will begin to seem less like a historical figure, and more like a companion you can learn with.

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How do I read such a complicated book?

This is not the kind of book you can pick up and read straight through, because too many things on each page are clamoring simultaneously for your attention. You will want to explore the page and learn what path through it works best for you. Ideally, you should study the text with others and together find your own method of making your way through the different commentaries. Here are some different approaches to try as you get started:

- Compare the two English translations (with the Hebrew, if you can). When the two translations disagree, check to see how the commentators resolve the question.
- Read a whole chapter at a time, in Hebrew or in either translation. Then read Abarbanel's questions about the chapter and think about them. Read the chapter again—perhaps in the *other* translation—to see whether you can think of answers to his questions.
- Pick a particular commentator as your guide, and follow all of his comments to the text as you read along.
- Read until you find a word or a verse that raises a question in *your* mind. Then check to see what each of the commentators has to say about it. Be sure to check the Additional Comments to see whether there's another comment on your question there.
- Follow any, or all, of the commentators through an entire subject, or a complete story. Think about the implications of a particular commentator's approach for interpreting other biblical passages.
- Dip into each page as you like until you find a thread you want to pursue.

Warning! The commentator will sometimes continue in the voice that is speaking in the verse itself (God's, or Moses', for example). After a dash (—) the commentator continues in his own voice. A dash may also separate different voices if the commentator is reconstructing a conversation or working through the steps of an argument.

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WHAT'S ON THE PAGE?

Text:

The **HEBREW TEXT** of the Bible, based on the Leningrad Codex, the oldest complete manuscript of the Hebrew Bible. This particular version of the Hebrew text can be found in the 1999 edition of the JPS Hebrew-English TANAKH. This edition is not meant for ritual use, and it thus omits some synagogue-related features. It meets only the traditional rabbinic standards (*halakhah*) for formatting a study Bible, which are less stringent than those for ritual purposes. For a fuller explanation of the difference between the Leningrad Codex and the 1999 JPS edition, see the preface to the latter.

Translations:

The **NJPS** translation of the Hebrew text, prepared in the 1960s by a committee of Jewish Bible scholars from the various movements, under the auspices of The Jewish Publication Society (JPS). This translation attempts to convey the meaning of the text without adhering slavishly to the literal Hebrew.

The **OJPS** translation of the Hebrew text, a revision of the American Standard Version (adapted from the King James Bible) prepared in the years before World War I by a committee of Jewish scholars, again under the auspices of JPS.

Questions:

ABARBANEL's questions. These questions, which serve as the basis for the commentary of Isaac Abarbanel (see below), will help the reader understand the *kinds* of questions that the commentators think need answering about the text. (The other commentators do not always make their questions explicit.)

Major Commentators:

RASHI – R. Solomon b. Isaac (1040–1105), northern France. Universally known by the acronym of his name, Rashi is the quintessential commentator on both Bible and Talmud. Jewish translations of both works often silently follow Rashi's comments when deciding how to render a difficult passage. Rashi's method, as he himself described it, was to explain the biblical text according to its straightforward sense—what the words mean in plain Hebrew—adding only those midrashic comments that fit the context and explain a linguistic feature of the text. According to his grandson Rashbam, toward the end of his life he admitted that, if he had the time, he would completely rewrite his commentary to take account of the new discoveries about the straightforward sense of the Bible being made on a daily basis. (See also "*Peshat* and *Derash*" under "Special Topics.")

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RASHBAM – R. Samuel b. Meir (ca. 1085–ca. 1174), northern France. Rashbam, Rashi's grandson, claimed that, though rabbinic interpretation of the Torah text was primary, the work of doing that kind of interpretation—the complicated linkage of every aspect of Jewish law to a letter, word, or phrase in the Torah—was finished. The neglected straightforward sense of the text, however, was only now in the process of being discovered. Rashbam, like his grandfather, was a skilled talmudist, but in his biblical commentary he felt free to interpret the text as it reads in plain Hebrew even when this contradicted rabbinic interpretation. (See also "*Peshat* and *Derash*" under "Special Topics.")

IBN EZRA – R. Abraham ibn Ezra (1091/92–1167), b. Spain, d. England. Ibn Ezra was Rashbam's almost exact contemporary, though scholars continue to disagree on whether they ever met or even knew each other's work. Ibn Ezra lived the first half-century of his life in Muslim Spain and spent the rest of his days wandering through Christian Europe—first in Italy, then in France, and, in his last years, in England. The twofold basis of his comments, as he explains in the long introduction to his work, is that they must conform to the grammar of the text (a field in which the Jews of the Muslim world were far more advanced than their compatriots in Christian countries) and to the bounds of reason. His attitude toward rabbinic tradition is ambiguous—he was not secure enough to contradict it directly, as did Rashbam, but often hinted at his doubts about one or another aspect of it. (See also "Medieval Jewish Philosophy" under "Special Topics.")

KIMHI – R. David Kimhi (1160?–1235?), Provence. Known by the acronym "Radak," he belonged to a family of illustrious scholars. Particularly known as a Hebrew grammarian, he is a major commentator to Genesis. His comments on the rest of the Torah, however, are relatively sparse, since they are abstracted from his works on language; in the other volumes in this series, Exodus to Deuteronomy, you will find him in the "Additional Comments."

NAHMANIDES – R. Moses b. Nahman (1195–ca. 1270), b. Spain, d. Israel. Also known by the acronym "Ramban," Nahmanides was advised to flee Spain after his victory in a "disputation" over the truth of Judaism and Christianity in which he was forced to participate. His careful analysis of the comments of his predecessors Rashi and Ibn Ezra makes him largely responsible for defining the contents of the standard Miqra'ot Gedolot page. (With rare exceptions, Rashbam is a 20th-century addition to the standard page.) In addition to his biblical and rabbinic scholarship, he was immersed in mystical learning. He sometimes explains the straightforward sense of the text and then adds an additional comment, often obscure, giving the meaning of the text "according to the way of Truth" or "the True interpretation"—a reference to mystical interpretation. (See also "Nahmanides' Mysticism" under "Special Topics.")

Editor's Annotations:

I have added notes to the text of the major commentators whenever I thought their comments needed some elucidation, or when there is a difficulty that might not be apparent to the reader. I have not generally supplied the rabbinic sources for their comments unless they do so themselves. Nor have I pointed out the reasons for their comments, unless I think the reader would find the comment puzzling without this information. I have generally left it to the reader to discover when the commentators are disputing with each other.

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Additional Commentators:

The **MASORAH** – (ca. 1000) The comments labeled Masorah ("tradition"), dating from the second half of the first millennium C.E., generally catalogue unusual spellings or word choices in the text, to give scribes assistance in recreating it exactly. Occasional comments were added to the Masorah at the time of the "Second Rabbinic Bible" (1525) by its editor, **Jacob b. Hayyim**, a kabbalist; these comments are not identified as coming from the Masorah, but from him personally.

BEKHOR SHOR – Joseph b. Isaac Bekhor Shor (12th c.), northern France. As a younger contemporary and student of Rashbam, his comments, like those of his teacher, focus on the straightforward sense of the text.

HIZKUNI – R. Hezekiah b. Manoah (mid-13th c.), France. He wrote a commentary that is largely an anthology of earlier comments (many now otherwise lost) as well as an analysis of Rashi's commentary.

GERSONIDES – R. Levi b. Gershom (1288–1344), Provence. Known also by the acronym "Ralbag," he viewed the biblical text largely through the lens of philosophy.

ABARBANEL – Don Isaac Abarbanel (1437–1508), b. Portugal, fled Spain, d. Italy. He was a prominent politician and financier in the Iberian Peninsula until the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492. His writings mostly date from his Italian period.

SFORNO – Obadiah b. Jacob Sforno (1470–1550), Italy. Trained in Jewish learning, humanistic studies, and medicine, he was both literally and metaphorically a Renaissance man.

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PRINCIPLES OF THE TRANSLATION

A basic assumption of the translation is that **the commentators are rewriting their original comments today, in contemporary English, for readers who do not know Hebrew**. This solves a number of the difficulties inherent in turning a Hebrew commentary on a Hebrew text into an English commentary without making the translator look as if he is constantly elbowing his way in between the reader and the commentator. So: **When an added word, phrase, or clause will make the commentator's meaning clear, I add it *as if it had been written by the commentator.*** When this technique does not suffice, I add a note in my own voice.

The following kinds of comments are regularly *omitted* from the translation:

1. The commentator gives a straightforward explanation of the sense of the text when the translation already follows it or makes it unnecessary.
2. The commentator gives another Hebrew word synonymous with the one used in the verse.
3. The commentator identifies a form grammatically (when there is no disagreement about it).
4. Rashbam or Ibn Ezra offers essentially the same comment as Rashi.
5. Rashbam offers a different verse than Rashi that explains the same phenomenon in the same way.
6. Nahmanides cites an explanation of Rashi or Ibn Ezra in full.
7. In his explanation, a commentator uses another biblical example, or a rabbinic citation, that would require more explanation than the biblical verse itself.
8. A commentator quotes a biblical verse in full when that verse is close enough to the verse being explicated for the reader to find it easily.

In addition, certain extended discussions in the commentaries of Ibn Ezra and Nahmanides have been condensed, summarized in a note, or (in some cases) omitted entirely. The comments of Kimhi, who wrote on Genesis only, are edited somewhat more heavily than those of the other commentators.

The following kinds of comments are nonetheless *retained* in the translation:

1. The comment includes a straightforward explanation of the sense of the text when the translation already follows it or makes it unnecessary, if one of the other commentators disagrees with it.

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2 The comment includes grammatical remarks that can be easily explained, that give some of the commentator's flavor, or that other commentators disagree with.

3 Nahmanides for stylistic reasons includes citations from other biblical books, which are not themselves necessarily relevant but can be integrated smoothly into the translation.

The following kinds of comments are regularly *changed*:

1 Discursive comments explaining more than one verse at a time are changed to fit the citation-comment pattern, when this is possible.

2 When the comment to one verse adds an explanation of a verse elsewhere in the text, I move that comment to the appropriate place.

3 When the English translation changes the order of the Hebrew text for clarity, I rearrange the comments to follow the English order and rephrase them if necessary.

4 When Nahmanides apparently had a different version of the commentary of Rashi or Ibn Ezra than we do, I reconcile the difference and/or explain it in a note.

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With regard to the *Commentators' Bible* project as a whole, I remain grateful to the long list of friends whom I thanked in the first pages of the Exodus volume, among them:

Ellen Frankel, of The Jewish Publication Society, for accepting the project;

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I was told just this morning of someone who received the Exodus volume as a gift and literally said, "I couldn't put it down." Financial support is invaluable, but knowing that people are excited to be learning from these volumes is wonderfully supportive as well. Thank you all!

Will there be future volumes in the series? That is a question better addressed to the publishers. But you can stay posted by following me on Twitter (@mcarasik) or by visiting or liking the *Commentators' Bible* Facebook page (https://www.facebook.com/Commentators-Bible-153960417956472/).

THE COMMENTATORS' INTRODUCTIONS

Rashi

There are many midrashim, but our Sages have already set them in place in Genesis Rabbah and the other midrash collections. My own purpose is to explain the straightforward sense of the text, using only those details from traditional lore that are most fit to resolve difficulties in the flow of the story. **[A]**

The words of Torah are like "a hammer that shatters rock" (Jer. 23:29), with a single phrase splitting into many different meanings. My own purpose is simply to settle what each verse means in context. **[B]**

[A] Rashi's Hebrew alludes to Prov. 25:11, "Like golden apples in silver showpieces is *a phrase well turned*," in the NJPS translation. This is from his comment to 3:8. **[B]** This is from Rashi's comment to 33:20.

Rashbam

Intelligent people will understand that all the words of our Sages, including their midrashim, are right and true. But the statement on B. Shab. 63a that "a biblical verse cannot lose its straightforward meaning" is to be understood this way: The laws and other midrashim are essentially derived not from the straightforward sense, but from superfluous details and other aspects of the specific wording of the text that provide an opportunity to learn the essence of the midrash. For example, in "such is the story of heaven and earth when they were created" (2:4), there was no strict need to write the word בהבראם, "when they were created." Our Sages, however, noticed that these letters could be rearranged to spell באברהם, "for Abraham." I shall demonstrate why I do not see things their way. **[A]**

Lovers of learning would do well to consider what our Sages have taught us: even if the Torah's essential purpose is to use the text to tell us the various midrashim and *halakhot* by way of allusion—through extraneous language and the use of the 32 interpretive rules of R. Eliezer b. R. Yose the Galilean and the 13 rules of R. Ishmael—still, no verse ever loses its straightforward sense. The first interpreters, out of piety, were so preoccupied with this more essential kind of interpretation, which as I said is the point of the Torah, that they were quite unfamiliar with serious interpretation of the straightforward text. Now the Sages declared, "Do not let your children study Bible too much." **[B]** Moreover, the Sages declared that study of the Bible was only more or less worthwhile; study of the Talmud was far more worthwhile. So they were simply not very familiar with the straightforward sense of the biblical text. You can therefore find someone like R. Kahana on B. Shab. 63a saying, "When I was 18 I had studied the entire Talmud—but I had no idea that a biblical verse cannot lose its straightforward meaning." Rabbenu Shlomo, **[C]** my maternal grandfather, the enlightener of the eyes of the Diaspora, who wrote commentaries on all parts of the Bible, paid great attention to interpretation of the straightforward sense. Yet when I, Samuel, the son of his son-in-law Meir (may the memory of the righteous be for a blessing),

challenged him to his face, he admitted to me that if he had the time he really ought to write additional commentaries to accommodate the new understandings that are being developed day by day. [D]

[A] This passage comes at the beginning of Rashbam's comment to 1:1. [B] "Bible" is Rashi's first interpretation of the difficult word used in this statement on B. Ber. 28b. [C] Rashi. [D] This paragraph comes from Rashbam's comment to 37:2.

Ibn Ezra

Commentators on the Torah follow five different paths:

The first path is long and wide, too lofty for our generation. If the truth is the point at the center of a circle, this path follows the circumference. Great scholars have followed this path—*ge'onim* like the R. Isaac who wrote two volumes on Genesis 1 and still did not quite finish. As for what he wrote on "Let there be light," he was walking in darkness. When "God said, 'Let the earth sprout vegetation,'" he spouted words. [A] Saadia and Samuel b. Hophni followed this same path; in the latter's comment to Genesis 28, he mentioned each of the prophets by name and place of exile. There is no value to this kind of commentary but its length. They include all sorts of other subjects (some of which they did not properly understand), whose proper place is not in biblical commentary.

The second path is that taken by Sadducees like Anan, [B] a group that is Jewish but perverse. They think they are standing on the center of the circle when in fact they have no idea where it is. This group includes all the heretics who do not believe in rabbinic tradition. Though they claim to give the straightforward sense of every verse, they are innocent of the grammar of Biblical Hebrew. How can they claim to correctly interpret the laws when not a single commandment is given its full explication in the Torah? The Torah does not even say how many months there are in a year. Is "the standing grain" (Deut. 16:9) wheat or barley? What if there is a drought that year? On Gen. 1:14 alone, these commentators demonstrate an appalling ignorance not merely of grammar but also of astronomy. They should get some friends, the only people who might believe them. Moses obviously expected us to rely on the Oral Torah for the details of the law. The two Torahs are complementary, and both of them are traditions passed down to us by our ancestors.

The third path, gloomy and dark, is completely outside the circle. Those who follow it think the Torah is entirely composed of riddles, so they interpret everything allegorically. They are so completely wrong that I needn't respond to them at length. They are right about one thing only: Each word in the Torah must be considered very carefully. If the Torah says something that does not stand to reason, only then should we look for a symbolic meaning. Reason is the foundation. The Torah was not given to people who have no sense. The "angel" that connects man and God is intelligence. But as long as what the Torah is saying is not irrational, we should take it at face value. Why make the obvious obtuse? I am not referring here to obvious metaphors like "circumcision of the heart." There are, of course, also stories like that of the Tree of Knowledge that are completely factual but also have a deeper meaning. This is quite natural; think of organs like the tongue, which have more than one function.

The fourth path is close to the center of the circle, and a great number of scholars in European lands have pursued it. They do not look at the words syntactically, but follow the midrashim. But since they find all these midrashim in books, why must they copy them

over a second time? Moreover, many of these midrashim contradict each other. Some of these midrashim are in fact quite profound—like the saying that the Torah dates back to 2,000 years before the creation of the world, which is quite true, but in a mystical way. It is obviously not strictly factual; there were no "years" before there was a sun to mark them. It's true that some midrashim can entertain those who are weary of laboring over a difficult halakhic passage; others are quite rational; still others can at least be used to educate children. (There are, after all, birds that can see only at night, not during the day, when it is too bright for them.) Was the world really created with a ב **[C]** for the sake of blessing? I can cite you a dozen verses where ב is used for something much more sinister. One with a little learning can bring forth many midrashim, but they are no more than the garments that cover the real body. As our Sages of blessed memory said long ago, "A biblical verse never loses its straightforward meaning." I can invent midrashim of my own just as profound as some of those that are cited. How about "the Lord is among them as in Sinai in holiness" (Ps. 68:18), where "among them" is בם, made up of the first letter of Genesis *and* the last letter?—showing that God had Israel in mind at the beginning of creation. In short, there is no end to midrash.

The fifth path, the one on which I shall set forth my own commentary, is the one I think is right in the eyes of God. I treat God alone with awe, and will show no favor to the Torah, seeking the correct meaning of each and every word with all my might. Then I will interpret each verse as best I am able. You will find the meaning of each word explained at its first occurrence. I will pay no attention to spelling; the traditional explanations of spelling differences are all midrashic. Am I supposed to believe that Moses wrote some words with a ו and Hezekiah's scribe wrote the same word in a different verse without a ו, both meaningfully despite the intervening centuries? Such stories are good for children. Onkelos translated the Torah correctly into Aramaic, and if he sometimes resorts to the use of midrash, we know that he understood the basics perfectly well. He was trying to make sure that the most oafish people would still understand the Torah correctly.

To be sure, when it comes to the laws, if we find two possible meanings, we will follow the one handed down by our righteous Sages. We can rely perfectly on them. God forbid that we get mixed up with the Sadducees, who say that our tradition falsifies the text—or, in such cases, the grammarians either. Our Sages were true; all their words are true. May the true God guide His servant on the true path. **[D]**

[A] Here and throughout we sample Ibn Ezra's many specific criticisms (which are often rhymed and/or sarcastic) rather than translating them in full. **[B]** A Karaite. **[C]** ב is the first letter of Gen. 1:1. **[D]** In a later version of this introduction, Ibn Ezra switches the order of the first and third paths, makes clear in describing the allegorical path that he is talking about Christian interpreters, and ends his introduction with a discussion of the phonetics and grammatical structure of Hebrew.

Kimhi

"The beginning of wisdom is the fear of the LORD; all who practice it gain sound understanding. Praise of Him is everlasting" (Ps. 111:10), said King David, may he rest in peace. One who prepares to occupy himself with wisdom must first occupy himself with fear of the Lord, making it and its ways the essential basis of his work. As our Sages of blessed memory said, "One whose fear of sin precedes his wisdom, his wisdom will endure; one whose wisdom precedes his fear of sin, his wisdom will not endure." **[A]** "Fear of the Lord" includes the Torah and commandments, the words of the prophets, and the tradition of the

Oral Torah; "wisdom" is philosophy. If one learns philosophy first, he will dare to deny the great miracles that are found in the Holy Scriptures, since that wisdom does not include them. But if he learns Torah first and sets his mind to believe everything that is written in it and in the other holy writings, he will find that philosophy is also included in them: "Observe them faithfully, for that will be proof of your wisdom and discernment to other peoples, who on hearing of all these laws will say, 'Surely, that great nation is a wise and discerning people'" (Deut. 4:6). Even the laws that at first glance have no rational basis will, to one who studies them closely, be found clearly based on reason. One who learns philosophy on this basis need not worry about confusing his Torah learning; he will have "fixed it as a peg in a firm place" (Isa. 22:23) and can exert all his powers to draw philosophy closer to it. **[B]**

So I, David Kimhi, the son of Joseph Kimhi, decided to write a book of commentary on the Bible in accordance with what I have learned, with what I have received via tradition, and with what my own thought (the Lord being with me) manages to achieve. I ask His help to begin and to conclude. I will comment on the verses and parse the words, making sense (when I can) of both the written tradition and the reading tradition. (The fact that these sometimes differ is presumably due to the expulsion to Babylonia, which resulted in the loss of documents and the deaths of scholars. The men of the Great Assembly found manuscripts that did not agree with one another. They followed the majority of the texts when they agreed that this was the correct reading, but when they could not agree they wrote it one way in the text and a second way in the margin.) I will sometimes include the Aramaic translation of Jonathan b. Uzziel, and also the words of the Sages in such places as necessary. In any case, I will also include some midrashim, for those who like them.

Now—with the help of the One who teaches knowledge to humanity—let me begin.

[A] M. Avot 3:9. **[B]** Kimhi's introduction continues in this vein.

Nahmanides

[A] In the name of God the great and awesome, with fear and trembling, I begin my new commentary on the Torah. I am quite aware that my knowledge is smaller than an ant's egg in comparison with the many secrets hidden in the house of Torah. Everything precious and marvelous, every profound secret, each glorious piece of wisdom is sealed up in her storehouse. "I have seen that all things have their limit, but Your commandment is broad beyond measure" (Ps. 119:96). My soul seeks Torah; there is a burning fire in my heart to follow in the footsteps of the giants of earlier generations, to write—like them—about the straightforward sense and the midrashim as well. I will set before me the lights of the pure lampstand: Rashi, whose commentary is "a crown of beauty and a diadem of glory" (Isa. 28:5)—"the birthright is his due" (Deut. 21:17). I shall "be infatuated with love" (Prov. 5:19) of his methods, but shall engage in give-and-take with them. For Ibn Ezra we shall have "open reproof" and "concealed love" (Prov. 27:5). May God, whom alone I fear, keep me from sin and error, show me the direct way, and open up for me the gates of light.

Our Master Moses wrote this book of Genesis and all the rest of the Torah directly from the mouth of the Holy One. It is likely that he wrote it on Mount Sinai, where he was told, "Come up to Me on the mountain and wait there, and I will give you the stone tablets with

the teachings and commandments which I have inscribed to instruct them" (Exod. 24:12). What was "inscribed" was the Ten Commandments; the other "commandments" would be the 613 commandments, and so the "teachings" would include the narratives from the beginning of Genesis on, which show people the way of faith. When Moses came down from the mountain, he wrote from the beginning of the Torah to the end of Exodus; he finished writing the rest of the Torah at the end of the 40 years, when he said, "Take this book of Teaching and place it beside the Ark of the Covenant of the LORD your God" (Deut. 31:26). This follows the opinion that the Torah was given to Israel scroll by scroll. But according to the opinion that the Torah was given in completed form, it was all written in the 40th year, when Moses was commanded, "Write down this poem and teach it to the people of Israel; put it in their mouths" (Deut. 31:19). One way or the other, Genesis was the first thing he wrote down. It was all spoken to him in direct quotation, but unlike the prophets (e.g., Jer. 1:4, Ezek. 2:1, and similarly throughout both books) he did not write about his experience in the first person. Instead, Moses wrote himself into the text in the third person: "God spoke to Moses and said to him" (Exod. 6:2). That is why Moses is not mentioned in the Torah before he is born. Don't be concerned by the long first-person speeches of the book of Deuteronomy; in those cases, Moses is writing down what he said to Israel.

The reason the Torah was written this way is that its existence preceded the creation of the world (let alone the birth of Moses). As our tradition tells us, it was written in black fire on white fire. Moses was simply like a scribe copying from another document. That is why he wrote as he did. But it is perfectly clear that the entire Torah, from the first words of Genesis through "the great might and awesome power that Moses displayed before all Israel" (Deut. 34:12), came from the mouth of the Holy One to the ear of Moses, just as Baruch would later say of Jeremiah, "He himself recited all those words to me, and I would write them down in the scroll in ink" (Jer. 36:18). The Holy One first told him about the creation of all things, upper and lower, including everything said in prophecy about the Account of the Chariot **[B]** and the Account of Creation, including the mystical traditions about them passed down by the Sages; the four lower elements and the natures of mineral, vegetable, animal, and human; their creation, their natures, their potentials, their deeds, and the ultimate extinction of those that are transitory—all of this was said to our master Moses, and he wrote it all down in the Torah, either explicitly or by allusion. As our Sages said, "Fifty gates of understanding were created in the world, and all but one of them were given to Moses: 'You have made him little less than divine' [Ps. 8:6]." The 50 gates of understanding lead to 50 branches of knowledge, from geology on up through the nature of the highest heavens. Presumably the fiftieth gate, the one not given to Moses, was knowledge of the Creator, which could not be given to one of His creations. The number 50 was known to them by tradition, but it is alluded to in the Torah via the counting of the Omer and of the Jubilee. **[C]** I will further describe the mysteries behind these when I reach them, God willing.

In any case, everything that was transmitted to Moses was written in the Torah, if not explicitly then by means of allusion: here a word, there a gematria, elsewhere the shape of a letter or the flourishes or crowns on it. As tradition says: When Moses arrived on high, he found the Holy One tying crowns to the letters. He asked, "What are those for?" You know the rest of the story; Moses was shown R. Akiva teaching piles and piles of arcane laws.

When his students asked where he had gotten these laws, Akiva replied, "They are laws given to Moses at Sinai." **[D]** For these allusions are incomprehensible except to one who has received the tradition passed down, from mouth to mouth, directly from Moses. The well-known *Book of Crowns* tells us exactly how many examples of each letter have these crowns and flourishes, but no one should take pride in knowing that they exist; the essential thing is understanding the profound secrets indicated by each one of them. As the midrash to the Song of Songs explains, "The king has brought me to his chambers" (Song 1:4) teaches us that all this can be learned from the Torah. All of Solomon's wisdom, too, came to him from the Torah, as he himself explains in "The Wisdom of Solomon." **[E]** That is what made Solomon's wisdom "greater than the wisdom of all the Kedemites and than all the wisdom of the Egyptians" (1 Kings 5:10).

We have a further tradition of Truth that the entire Torah is made up of names of the Holy One, but divided differently so that they can be read as sentences. For example, the first words of the Torah, *bereshit bara elohim* (בראשית ברא אלהים), can be divided differently to read *ba-rosh yitbaré elohim* (בראש יתברא אלהים)—"In the beginning, Elohim created Himself." The same applies to the entire rest of the Torah—quite aside from the various combinations of names and calculations of their numerical value. See (e.g.) Rashi's explication of the 72-letter name of God found in Exod. 14:19–21 in his comments on B. Suk. 45a. That is why a Torah scroll with a single missing or additional letter may not be used, and why the Masoretes devoted such effort to precisely counting and listing the cases where extra letters to indicate vowel sounds are or are not used. (Our tradition explains Neh. 8:8 as showing Ezra the scribe engaged in this same activity.) So the version of the Torah we described earlier, written in black fire on white fire, apparently had no spaces between the words, permitting it to be read either as a list of divine names or as we do. The written Torah was given to Moses with spaces as we have them, but the other reading, with the names, was given to him orally. The 72-letter name itself can be written continuously, in groups of three letters, or in other ways used by the masters of this tradition. **[F]**

[G] Now let me explain the kind of commentary I intend to write. For the sake of those who can study Torah only on Sabbaths and holidays (and like my predecessors), I will try to attract them by discussing the straightforward sense of the text, with a few additional pleasant things to gain the favor of the learned. I insist that no one pry too deeply into the secrets of the Torah that I reveal here—those that are meant to be transmitted orally, from the mouth of a scholar who has received the tradition to the ear of an intelligent person who is ready to receive it. I proclaim with certainty that logical analysis of these traditions is in any case foolish; indeed, it can be quite dangerous. Only evil can come of it: "A man who strays from the path of prudence will rest in the company of ghosts" (Prov. 21:16). But you will find some new ideas in our commentary, though everything follows the warning of Genesis Rabbah: "Do not inquire into things too great for you; do not investigate things too hard for you; do not attempt to know things too wonderful for you; do not ask about things concealed from you. Comprehend what you are permitted to comprehend. You have no business with hidden things."

[A] This paragraph of Nahmanides' introduction is written in rhyme; our paragraph gives the flavor of it but is not a complete translation. **[B]** See Ezekiel 1. **[C]** See Lev. 23:15–16 and Lev. 25:8–11. **[D]** For the complete story, see B. Men. 29b. **[E]** A book of the Apocrypha, not included in the Jewish Bible, from which Nahmanides quotes here. **[F]** The Hebrew word for "tradition" here is *kabbalah*. Each of the three verses of Exod. 14:19–21 has 72 letters, which can be combined in various ways. The phrase *ani ve-ho* used in the *Hoshanot* prayers recited on Sukkot is derived from one of them. **[G]** At this point Nahmanides' comments begin again to rhyme.

GENESIS בראשית

BERESHIT

בראשית

NJPS When God began to create heaven and earth— **OJPS** In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.

בְּ רֵאשִׁית* בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֵת הַשָּׁמַיִם

v. 1. ב׳ רבתי לפי נוסחים מקובלים

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why is the Creator called "God" throughout this chapter rather than "Lord" (that is, the Tetragrammaton), which is the name linked to creation by all the prophets? ✦ Once "God created the heaven and the earth" (v. 1, OJPS), doesn't that already imply their complete material existence? So if God created them "in the beginning," what was left to be created afterward? (I cannot accept the explanations of Rashi and Ibn Ezra, nor, for that matter, that of Nahmanides.) ✦ Why is the creation of the spiritual beings, the angels, not mentioned? They are one-third of the world, and the highest third of it at that.

RASHI **1 When God began.** R. Isaac said: There was no need to begin the Torah until "This month shall mark for you the beginning of the months" (Exod. 12:2), the first commandment given to Israel. So what was the point of starting with "the beginning" (OJPS)? Because "He revealed to His people His powerful works, in giving them the heritage of nations" (Ps. 111:6). If the nations of the world should say to Israel, "You are thieves! You have conquered the land belonging to the seven nations of Canaan," they can reply, "The whole world belongs to the Holy One. He created it and gave it to whomever He wanted to. He first willed to give it to them, and then He willed to take it from them and give it to us." **When God began to create.** This verse absolutely demands, "Explain me as our Sages did!" According to the midrash, this verse means, "God created heaven and earth for the sake of *reshit* [beginning]." They were created for the sake of Torah, which is called "the

RASHBAM **1 When God began to create.** **[A]** I shall lay out the explanations of earlier commentators on this verse to demonstrate why I do not see things their way. Some understand the Hebrew to mean "In the beginning God created" (OJPS). But this is impossible; as v. 2 tells us, there was "a wind from God sweeping over the water," meaning that the water too already existed. Moreover, the first Hebrew word of the text does *not* mean "in the beginning," but "at the beginning *of*," as in 10:10, where we read that "*the beginning of* [Nimrod's] kingdom was Babel." One who explains it to mean "when God began to create heaven and earth," following the syntax of "When the LORD *first spoke* to Hosea" (Hosea 1:2), is saying that *before* heaven and earth were created, the earth was "unformed and void,"

[A] Rashbam's introductory comments have been moved to the "Introductions" section.

KIMHI **1 God.** The Hebrew word implies rulership, and has plural grammatical form, as we sometimes find also with human rulers. In this first chapter, no other divine name but this is used, since this chapter explains the formation and governance of the world. We learn that there is a God ruling the world, and that it was made by a single Creator, who decided to create the world and used His wisdom to do so. Since the verb used here is singular, there can be no question of plural gods (and see Ibn Ezra's comment). **Began.** The noun "beginning" (OJPS) is not in construct form here, but in absolute form, as in

IBN EZRA **1 When God began.** The philologists say that "in" of "in the beginning" (OJPS) is extraneous here, as it is in the expression "at first" (compare 13:4 with "these shall march *first*" of Num. 2:9). But the *sheva* under the preposition in our verse makes clear that "in *the* beginning" is not the correct translation. Others say that our word always means "the beginning *of*," and that a following word must be understood here: at the beginning of the evening, or the night, or the darkness. But they have forgotten "He chose for himself the beginning part" (Deut. 33:21), which has no "of." Grammatically, this is of course correct; but the mind cannot actually conceive of a beginning in the abstract, a beginning that is not the beginning *of* something. Still others agree that the preposition is extraneous and take it as a title: "The Beginning." This (in their view) would be intended to prevent people from thinking that heaven and earth had no beginning. In my opinion our word does indeed indicate "of," just as it does in "*At the beginning of* the reign of King Jehoiakim" (Jer. 27:1). Do not be surprised to see such an expression connected to a past tense verb ("created," OJPS)! The Hebrew of "When the LORD first spoke to Hosea" (Hosea 1:2) and "city where David camped"

NAHMANIDES **1 When God began.** Rashi's comment citing R. Isaac is questionable. It was in fact quite necessary to start the Torah with creation, which is the root of faith. One who does not believe in creation but thinks the world has always existed is one who denies the essential principle **[A]**—he has no Torah whatsoever. The correct answer to the question of why the Torah begins here is that the Account of Creation is a profound mystery that is not explained in the text. It cannot be thoroughly understood except by means of the tradition that goes back to our master Moses, who received it directly from the Almighty. Those who do know it are required to conceal it. That is why R. Isaac said the Torah did not really need to begin with creation, let alone with all the fussy details of what was created on which day—not even the story of Adam and Eve, their sin and their expulsion from the garden of Eden. All this could not really be fully comprehended from the text alone. Much less so was there a necessity for the stories of the Flood and the Tower of Babel. Ordinary Jews could easily have gotten along without all these. Exod. 20:11, "For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth and sea, and all that is in them, and He rested on the seventh day," would be enough for them to believe what they needed to believe. Those few individuals who passed down the Oral Law as given to Moses on Mount Sinai would still have full knowledge. R. Isaac was simply giving a superficial reason for why the Torah begins here, telling the story of the creation of man and how the Holy One "made him master over His handiwork, laying the world at his feet" (Ps. 8:7). The garden of Eden, the choicest of all created places, was made for them to dwell in until their sin expelled them from it, just as the generation of the Flood was expelled for their sin from the world as a whole, only the most righteous one among them (and his sons) escaping. Their offspring, in turn, were scattered throughout the world, seizing for their various clans whatever parts of the earth they could. It is therefore fitting that when a nation goes on sinning, it should lose its place and another nation should come along and take possession of it. That has been God's rule for the world forever. All the more so should this be true of Canaan, the nation cursed in 9:25–27 with being an eternal slave to his brothers. That nation could certainly not claim the choicest of all settled lands; instead, that land came into the possession of the servants

[A] The existence of God.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **1 When God began.** The word *reshit* occurs with the preposition ב and no suffix just five times: here and in Jer. 26:1 and 27:1—all at the beginning of the verse—and in the middle of a verse in Jer. 28:1 and 49:34 (Masorah). The Torah begins with ב—the *second* letter of the alphabet, not the first—because it is surrounded on three sides, the east, west, and south, but open on the north side, from which come evil winds that do harm to the world (Hizkuni). If you look at the opinions of those who lived in the

RASHI *beginning* of His course" (Prov. 8:22), and for the sake of Israel, which is called "the *first* fruits of His harvest" (Jer. 2:3). But when you mean to interpret the text straightforwardly, interpret it this way: "At the beginning of the creation of heaven and earth, the earth was unformed and void and dark. God said, 'Let there be light.'" The text is not saying that heaven and earth were created first. If it were, it would have to say *barishonah*, which is how you say "in the beginning" (OJPS) in Biblical Hebrew; *bereshit*, the word that is actually used, only occurs in construct with the following word, e.g., "at the *beginning of* the reign of" So-and-So. For other examples, see 10:10 and Deut. 18:4. Here too the text must be understood as if *bara* were a gerund, not a past tense: "At the beginning of God's creating." For a similar Hebrew grammatical form, see "When the LORD *first spoke* to Hosea" (Hosea 1:2), more literally, "at the onset of the Lord's speaking with Hosea." Notice that that phrase is immediately followed by the words, "the LORD said to Hosea." If you insist that our verse is saying heaven and earth were created first, you would have to assume that there is a missing word, "At the beginning of *everything*, God created heaven and earth." We do find examples of this, e.g. in Job 3:10, Amos 6:12, Isa. 8:4 and 46:10, where the Hebrew text is missing a word that needs to be filled in. But if this

KIMHI "I foretell the end from the beginning" (Isa. 46:10). The OJPS translation is therefore the correct one. To call it "beginning" is pushing the boundaries of language, as that is a word of temporal sequence, and time itself began only with the movement of the spheres. **Create.** The Hebrew root can include fashioning something out of preexistent materials: "When God *created* man, He made him in the likeness of God" (5:1); "*Fashion* a pure heart for me, O God" (Ps. 51:12). But (unlike "form" of 2:7) it does not have to

NAHMANIDES of the Lord and descendants of His great friend, Abraham: "He gave them the lands of nations; they inherited the wealth of peoples, that they might keep His laws and observe His teachings" (Ps. 105:44–45). That is, He expelled those who rebelled against Him and settled there those who served Him, letting them know that they inherited the land because of their service to Him: "So let not the land spew you out for defiling it, as it spewed out the nation that came before you" (Lev. 18:28). As our tradition puts it: "To explain the Account of Creation to flesh and blood would be impossible, so the text conceals it behind the phrase, 'God created.'" **When God began to create.** The midrash cited by Rashi is actually profoundly obscure. There are many other things that are called *reshit* ("beginning"), each with its own midrash. (Those of little faith make fun of how many there are.) There are midrashim saying that the world was created for the sake of the first loaf (Num. 15:20), the tithes (Deut. 18:4), the first fruits (Exod. 23:19), and even Moses (Deut. 33:21). What the Sages meant by this was that the world was created by means of the 10 *sefirot*, and that *reshit* refers specifically to the *sefirah* of Hokhmah ("Wisdom"), which is the basis of everything: "The LORD founded the earth by wisdom" (Prov. 3:19). Tithing is also a clear reference to this. Giving a "tenth" is an obvious allusion to the 10 *sefirot*. And so for everything that is called *reshit*. "Israel" is in fact a reference to the Assembly of Israel. **[B]** It is impossible to go on at length about this in writing. Even alluding to it is quite dangerous, since people will "explain" such allusions in completely false ways. I have only said even this much in order to stifle those with little faith and less

[B] Kabbalistically, the Assembly of Israel refers to the Shekhinah.

RASHBAM and (again) that the water had already been created. But this too is obviously nonsense. There is no "earth" to be "unformed and void" if the earth has not yet been created before the water was fashioned. To understand the straightforward sense of the verse, you must understand this basic point: Biblical texts regularly mention things that are not yet relevant in order to foreshadow later texts. For example, 9:18 tells us that "the sons of Noah who came out of the ark were Shem, Ham, and Japheth"; why does it add, "Ham being the father of Canaan"? Because in 9:25 Noah will say, "Cursed be Canaan." If Canaan had not already been mentioned, we would have no idea why Noah was cursing him. Another example. When "Reuben went and lay with Bilhah, his father's concubine" (35:22), why does the verse continue, "and Israel found out"? After all, Israel does not say a word to Reuben about it. But it is meant to prepare the reader to hear Jacob to say on his deathbed, "Unstable as water, you shall excel no longer; for when you mounted your father's bed, you brought

IBN EZRA (Isa. 29:1) displays precisely this same syntax, though some point out that the apparent verb in the Hosea verse is the same as a noun in Jer. 5:13. As to what it means, all this will become clear to you in my comments to v. 2. **God.** Since we have a singular form *elo'ah*, **[A]** we realize that *elohim*, the more common way to say "God," is a plural form. But this is a standard phenomenon of language. One who is lower refers to one who is higher by using plural forms. In Arabic, the great refer to themselves by using the plural. The holy tongue does the same thing. In "the owner must acquiesce" (Exod. 22:10) and "a harsh master" (Isa. 19:4), the nouns have plural form but the verb and the adjective are singular. (In fact, some of the simplest prepositions in the Hebrew language take suffixes as if they were plural nouns.) In our verse, too, though "God" has its plural form, the verb is explicitly singular. Now, speech is referred to as a "tongue" or (in Hebrew) a "lip" because we see that that is where the sounds come forth. Similarly, the rational soul is called "heart," **[B]** though the actual heart is a physical body and the soul is not, because the heart is the primary physical repository of the rational soul. In just this way, God is called *elohim*, which more properly refers to the angels who do His will. See my comments to Exod. 23:20–21, where I will explain somewhat of the mystery of God's name. Do not by any means believe Saadia's assertion that human beings rank higher than the angels. I have completely refuted his arguments in my book *Basic Hebrew Grammar*. **[C]** Here, I need say nothing more than to remind you that prophets are the greatest of human beings, and that the prophet Zechariah addressed the angel who spoke to him (Zech. 1:9) as "lord." The great Joshua too fell on his face before the angel of the Lord: "Joshua threw himself face down to the ground and, prostrating himself, said to him, 'What does my lord command his servant?'" (Josh. 5:14), and so did Daniel. **[D]** But why go on? "Praise the God of *elohim*" (Ps. 136:2) is quite enough to demonstrate that the real meaning of the word *elohim* is "angels." But judges, who are responsible for upholding God's laws, can also be referred to as *elohim*. Just remember that "god" is a description, not a name. Moreover, you should not imagine (as some do based on Ps. 104:4) that angels are creatures of air and fire. **[E] Create.** Most of the commentators say that this Hebrew verb refers specifically to creation *ex nihilo*, making something out of nothing, as in "if the LORD *make* a new thing" (Num. 16:30). But they have forgotten "God *created* the great sea monsters" (v. 21), which were brought forth from the

[A] E.g., "He forsook the *God* who made him" (Deut. 32:15). **[B]** "Heart" is the biblical idiom for "mind." **[C]** *Sefer ha-Yesod*. **[D]** See Dan. 10:9 and 15. **[E]** We omit the rest of Ibn Ezra's comments on Psalm 104.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS time of Moses, it is obvious that philosophy was sorely lacking in those days (Gersonides). *Reshit* here does indeed mean "the beginning of," as Rashi says; it implies "at the beginning of time." As to the *–im* ending of *elohim*, that does not imply anything about the plurality of God; think of the name Ephraim and many others. The *mem* is there because otherwise we would read the word as *elohei*, "God of" (Abarbanel). **To create.** Creation from nothing takes no time at all (Sforno). **Heaven and earth.** The

RASHI is what you think in our case, what about the water, which already exists in v. 2? For we are never told the water was created. So it must have preceded the creation of earth—and of heaven too according to our Sages, who say that heaven (*shamayim*) was created from a combination of fire and water (*esh-mayim*). You are, therefore, forced to admit that our verse says nothing about what was created when. **God.** And not "the Lord." At first the intention was to create heaven and earth using the divine aspect of

KIMHI involve creation of a physical object; compare "But if the LORD *brings about* something unheard-of" (Num. 16:30). Here creation is creation *ex nihilo*. See "All who are linked to My name, whom I have created, formed, and made for My glory" (Isa. 43:7), where "creating" refers to bringing forth something from nothing, "forming" to infusing the matter with form and structure, and "making" to perfecting the various separate individuals of each kind. **Heaven and earth.** The direct object marker *et* that precedes each of these words is discussed in detail by our Sages. They conclude that all "the generations

NAHMANIDES wisdom, who make fun of rabbinic tradition. With regard to the order of creation, Rashi says the creation of light preceded everything else, and Ibn Ezra explained it this way as well; see particularly his comment to "the earth" of v. 2. According to him, nothing at all was created on the first day but light. The difficulty with Rashi's comment is his statement that *reshit* occurs only in construct form. But see again Deut. 33:21, not to mention Isa. 46:10, "I foretell the end from the *beginning*." (He had some other grammatical arguments as well.) But now hear the straightforward explanation of this verse, correctly and clearly. The Holy One created all things from absolute zero. The Hebrew verb used here for "create" is the only word we have in the language for creation *ex nihilo*. Nothing that is "made" (rather than "created"), under the sun or above it, comes literally from nothing. The Holy One brought forth from complete nothingness an extraordinarily subtle substance lacking any mass, but having the power to bring into existence things ready to receive form and to move from potential to actual. This was the first material substance, what the Greeks call *hyle*. After this *hyle*, God "created" nothing else. Instead, He "made" and "formed" things. For everything was fashioned from this *hyle*—the forms were clothed in matter and arranged appropriately.

The Holy One is called "God" (*elohim*) in this connection because that name—deriving from a combination of *el* ("power") and *hem* ("them")—describes Him as master of all powers. (The deeper meaning of this will be revealed later.) The straightforward sense of this passage is therefore correctly understood as follows: God first created heaven, bringing forth its substance from nothing, and earth, bringing forth *its* substance from nothing. "Earth" in this larger sense includes all four of the elements: earth, air, fire, and water: "The heaven and the earth were finished, *and all their array*" (2:1). With this creation, consisting physically of nothing more than a vanishingly small point with no physical matter, all the created things of heaven and earth were indeed created. The direct object marker *et* implies the essence of a thing, though our Sages always take it to imply something additional coming into play, for they derive it from the verb *ata* as in "Morning *came*" (Isa. 21:12). So they said that "*et* the heaven" implies that the sun, moon, stars, and constellations came into being along "with" heaven, and that "*et* the earth"

RASHBAM disgrace—my couch he mounted!" (49:4). The same phenomenon is found in many other places.

Now, this whole passage about the six days of creation is meant to prepare the reader to understand "Remember the sabbath day and keep it holy . . . For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth and sea, and all that is in them, and He rested on the seventh day" (Exod. 20:8,11). That is why v. 31 says "*the* sixth day"—the same "sixth day" that the Holy One would speak of when He said "Six days you shall labor and do all your work" (Exod. 20:9). Moses wanted to demonstrate to the Israelites that the word of the Holy One was truth. "You think this world has been in existence forever just as you see it now, full of all kinds of

IBN EZRA waters (see v. 20). In v. 27 "created" is used this way three times! "I form the light, and create darkness" (Isa. 45:7) is even more disastrous for their theory; here God is "creating" nothingness—light is a substance, darkness merely its absence. The correct explanation is precisely this: The word ברא is two different verbs: one, a verb that means "to create out of nothing," and another that is an alternate form of the verb ברה. Compare "to *eat* something" (2 Sam. 3:35, the ה form), versus "*feeding* on the first portions" (1 Sam. 2:29, the א form). The essential meaning of this other ברא is "to cut" or "to make a precise delineation." Scientifically minded people will understand what I am talking about. **[F]** But natural philosophers differ on the larger question. Some think that the Holy One is continuously creating the Torah and the Throne of Glory, and that they have no beginning or end; others say that this is true only of the Holy One Himself. **Heaven and earth.** Both words are preceded in Hebrew by the particle *et*, marking the direct object. It is sometimes omitted, as in "God created man" (5:1), and in a few rare cases is even used with the subject (see 1 Sam. 17:34). But the same word can also mean "with" or "from." The Hebrew of our verse literally says "*the* heaven and *the* earth" (OJPS), to make clear that the words refer to the same sky and earth that we ourselves see. Be aware also that the Hebrew word is always "heavens," in the plural. The word implies both physical height and metaphorical stature, as it does in Arabic, which largely follows the same pattern as Hebrew. Unlike English "skies" or "heavens," the Hebrew word is a dual form that, like the words for "noon" and "millstones," is never found in the singular. (Scholars of astronomy will understand why.) **[G]** Saadia says that the earth is like the point at the center of a circle; the heavens that surround it constitute the circle. He also says that their creation also implies the creation of everything in them (e.g., water and fire). Others think water is implied in the creation of earth and air is implied in the creation of heaven. In my opinion, the "heaven and earth" of our verse are the "expanse" of v. 6 and the "dry land" of v. 9. For on each individual day, only a single thing was created: light on Day One, the sky on Day Two, plants on Day Three, the lights on Day Four, and the living creatures on Days Five and Six; see Psalm 104 for proof. But a circle cannot be created before its center, nor can the center be created before the circle, so the Sages said that heaven and earth were created simultaneously, using as their proof the verse "My own hand founded the earth, My right hand spread out the skies. I call unto them, let them stand *together*" (Isa. 48:13). But that is not what this verse means. After all, how could the Holy One "call" to something that did not yet exist? He is simply saying, "I created them, and when I call them, they stand together before Me like servants ready to do their Master's will." See also Ps. 119:89–91. For our part, we will

[F] In his comment to Num. 16:30, Ibn Ezra explains that the verb can refer to cutting material that already exists into a new form. **[G]** Ibn Ezra is apparently referring to the "spheres" in which the sun, moon, and planets were thought to move. See Special Topics, "Medieval Jewish Philosophy."

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS Holy One could certainly have made these out of two different kinds of *hyle*—but this is philosophy and has nothing to do with those of the Torah faith. As Jer. 23:28 puts it, "How can straw be compared to grain?" In fact, this verse is intended to refute three philosophical ideas: (1) that time has no beginning; (2) that it is impossible to create something from nothing; and (3) that God, being one, could not produce multiplicity. But these two were created from nothing at the beginning of time. That is why there is no

NJPS [2]the earth being unformed and void, with darkness over the surface of the deep and a wind from

OJPS [2]Now the earth was unformed and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the spirit of God hovered over the face of

וְאֵת הָאָרֶץ׃ [2] וְהָאָרֶץ הָיְתָה תֹהוּ וָבֹהוּ
וְחֹשֶׁךְ עַל־פְּנֵי תְהוֹם וְרוּחַ אֱלֹהִים

RASHI justice, represented by the word *elohim*, "God." But He saw that such a world was not viable and so He prefixed the Tetragrammaton to it: "When the LORD God made earth and heaven" (2:4). **[A]**

2 Unformed and void. Rather, "astonishment and desolation." The combination is used here to imply a desolation so great that one would be shocked and astonished at seeing the sheer emptiness of it. **Over the surface of the deep.** That is, the surface of

[A] The word *elohim* is traditionally sometimes understood to refer to human judges; see, e.g., Rashi's comment to Exod. 21:6. The Tetragrammaton ("LORD" in 2:4) is understood to be God's personal name.

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Since everything was created through speech—as we are told, "By the word of the LORD the heavens were made" (Ps. 33:6)—why does the first day of creation differ in this respect from the others? For (1) on the first day there is no "God said, 'Let there be a heaven and an earth'"; (2) on all other days "God" precedes the act of creation, but here (in the Hebrew) the verb of creation comes first; and (3) the expression "and it was so" does not occur here as it does on the other days. ✦ What is "the earth being unformed and void" (v. 2) telling us?

RASHBAM good things? Not so! Rather, 'When God had begun to create . . .'" and so forth. That is, near the start of creation—when the upper heavens and the earth had all been in existence for however long a time—at the period when the story starts, the earth was unformed and void and so on.

2 The earth being unformed and void. The earth, which was already in existence, was unformed and void. There was nothing whatsoever in it: "I look at the earth, it is *unformed and void*; at the skies, and their light is gone. . . . I look: no man is left" (Jer. 4:23,25); "Birds of the sky and beasts as well have fled and are gone" (Jer. 9:9). That is what "unformed and void" means: completely desolate. **With darkness over the surface of the deep.** This too is mentioned in the Jeremiah passage:

KIMHI of the heaven and of the earth" (2:4, OJPS) were created along with them. Imagine a farmer who plants many different kinds of seeds at once, some of which sprout after two days, some after three, and some after four.

2 The earth being unformed and void. Now we learn that the creation of earth differed from that of heaven. Heaven, with its nine spheres—for the seven planets, the constellations, and the Prime Mover **[A]**—was created complete, but the earth was not complete when first created. There was not yet any other created thing in it or on it. It was entirely covered with water. **A wind from God.** Rather, a "spirit" (OJPS)—God's will. But

[A] See Special Topics, "Medieval Jewish Philosophy."

IBN EZRA rely on the words of Moses, God's messenger. If we find some scientific fact that comports with them we will certainly be happy, just as we will when we find some profound rabbinic explanation that comports with scientific fact. So we will not ask when the angels were created, nor whether heaven or earth was created first. We can say, however, that "heaven" refers to the upper heavens, above the firmament, and earth to the earth below the waters. For the sphere of fire is above that of air, which is above that of water, with the earth below it.

2 The earth. It is strange that "earth" is *eretz*, but "the earth" is not *ha-eretz* but always *ha-aretz*. No other word exhibits this phenomenon. The verse appears to begin with the words *"and* the earth," but this is more properly translated "now, the earth . . ." (OJPS); Arabic has a similar particle. Moses is certainly not writing here about the World to Come, that of the angels, but of our world, the physical earth. Those who think that v. 1 refers to the upper heavens and not to the ordinary sky that we see—what do they make of "earth" in that verse? Natural philosophers have demon-

NAHMANIDES implies that along "with" the earth all the trees, the plants, the garden of Eden, and in fact every material thing came into being. **[C]** It seems to me that this created "point," once clothed in form (*bohu*), must be what the Sages call the Foundation Stone. **[D]**

2 Unformed and void. Know that the heavens and all that is in them are a single substance, and so is the earth and all that is in it. The Holy One created these two substances from nothing, and they are the only things that were "created." Everything else was made from them. The word *tohu* ("unformed" of NJPS) is the Hebrew word for *hyle* (see the end of my previous comment). As for *bohu* ("void"), that is the word for the "forms" that are clothed with matter. It is a compound word: *bo-hu*, "it is in it." See how these words are used in Isa. 34:11, "He shall measure it with a line of *tohu* and with stones of *bohu*." The *tohu* is what an artisan uses to outline the plan of a building; the stones are the *bohu*, the *form* the building takes. Note also Isa. 40:17, "All nations are as naught in His sight; He accounts them as less than nothing and *tohu*." There is nothing, and next there is *tohu*. So *tohu* is barely anything at all. As *Sefer Yetzirah* puts it, "He formed matter from *tohu* and made nothingness into somethingness." *The Midrash of R. Nehunya b. ha-Kaneh* **[E]** explains it similarly. So the earth was *hyle* and form (again, "earth" here refers to all four elements: earth, air, fire, and water). **Darkness.** This refers specifically to fire, since the basic element of fire is indeed dark. (If it were red like ordinary fire, the night sky would not be dark.) **The deep.** This is the water, which forms a limit to the earth. That is

[C] The particle *et* sometimes marks the direct object, but can also mean "with." **[D]** See B. Sanh. 26b and B. Yoma 54b. **[E]** *Sefer ha-Bahir.*

strated quite clearly that "earth" of both these verses is the same earth on which we live. The "seven earths" of rabbinic literature are simply a way of referring to seven different climate zones. Similarly, saying the Temple was at "the center of the earth" was simply a way of saying it was at the center of the inhabited world. For it is quite far from the center of the earth. **Unformed and void.** Saadia says this word *tohu* is related to the following *tehom* ("deep"), but that is impossible; the *m* is part of the root in that word. According to *Sefer Yetzirah*, *tohu* is a green line, and *bohu* means "slimy stones." But the correct translation is "unformed and void," following Onkelos. For *tohu*, see "an empty howling *waste*" (Deut. 32:10) and "to follow *worthless things*" (1 Sam. 12:21), things that have no reality; *bohu* is a synonym of *tohu*. (The ו of both words replaces the more standard ה, a common phenomenon.) The sense of the phrase is that when

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS "God said" here; that phrase invokes creation from something that already exists. I explained things differently in my commentary to Tractate Avot, but there I relied on Nahmanides' opinion. Now I have carefully explained the real truth (Abarbanel).

2 The earth being unformed and void. Just because we are told it was void does not mean you're allowed to ask what this void actually was; in fact, that it is a serious transgression (Bekhor Shor). Out of respect for the Shekhinah, we are not told that the heaven was "unformed and void" (Hizkuni). The heaven and its various immaterial levels cannot be accessed by the human imagination; that is why the verse begins by describing the earth (Abarbanel). **Darkness.** Contra NJPS, the second dash belongs here; the text now resumes with

NJPS God sweeping over the water—[3]God said, "Let there be

OJPS the waters. [3]And God said: "Let there be light." And

מְרַחֶפֶת עַל־פְּנֵי הַמָּיִם׃ 3 וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ What exactly is the nature of the "light" created in v. 3? ✦ Why does v. 3 say neither that "God made" the light nor "and it was so," both of which are found with the other creative acts?

RASHI the water that lay above the earth. **A wind from God sweeping over the water.** The Hebrew word means not just "wind" but also "spirit" (see OJPS). The Throne of Glory was "hovering" (OJPS) motionless over the surface of the water, like a dove hovering over its nest, by means of a wind from the mouth of the Holy One and by His say-so.

KIMHI "a wind from God" also implies "a mighty wind." Hebrew uses *el* and *yah* to indicate the superlative: "Nineveh was an *enormously* large city" (Jon. 3:3); "*mighty* cedars" (Ps. 80:11); "a *blazing* flame" (Song 8:6); "a land of *deep* gloom" (Jer. 2:31). **Over the water.** "Water" (like "heaven") has dual grammatical form in Hebrew, in this case with reference to the upper waters and the lower.

3 There was light. The light was already in the heaven, since the lights were created with their spheres, all at a single instant, just like everything else. But nothing went into effect on earth until its proper day.

NAHMANIDES why the waters of the sea are referred to as "deeps" (see, e.g., Exod. 15:5 and 8 as well as Jon. 2:6). Even the ocean floor can be described by this term: "He sent His blast against the Sea of Reeds; it became dry; He led them through the deep as through a wilderness" (Ps. 106:9; see similarly Isa. 63:13). **A wind from God.** This is of course the air. It is well known that the four elements constitute a single entity. Its pedestal is the globe of the earth, which is completely surrounded by water, as the water is surrounded by air and the air by fire. What our verse is saying is that fire encompassed the mixture of water and earth, with air blowing over it in the darkness, thus "sweeping" over the water. This "wind" was both less material and higher than all the other elements, but was sweeping over the water by divine command. That is why it is described as being "from God." You may wish to find the angels—who have no material bodies—also "created," but this is not explained in the Torah. Tradition says they were created on the second day, to prevent you from thinking that they assisted in the creation of the world. But if you manage to understand why the first word of the Torah is "beginning" rather than simply saying "God created" with "God" as the first word, you will know that, according to the Way of Truth, the text is speaking about the lower beings but alluding also to the upper ones. Again, *reshit* is an allusion to the *sefirah* of Hokhmah or Wisdom, which is the beginning of all beginnings, as I said earlier. The Jerusalem Targum actually translates *reshit* here with the Aramaic equivalent of *ḥokhmah*. Note finally that *reshit* is crowned here with a crown **[F]** on the letter ב.

3 God said. "Said" here does not refer to actual speech, but to will and intention. Compare "whatever you want" of 1 Sam. 20:4, which is literally, "whatever you say." In this same way, "as the LORD has spoken" (24:51) really means "as the Lord wishes." The verb "say" can frequently mean "think": "Who *think* to yourself" (Isa. 47:8); "And the clans of Judah will say to themselves" (Zech. 12:5). That is, when God "said," it required no effort. In Genesis Rabbah, the Sages specifically call this "saying" thought, implying that there was something more to it than mere desire; there was a rationale for creation. **Let there be light.** "Let there be" implies something that will take place in the immediate future, as in "you are to be their king" (Neh. 6:6). Our text is saying that when God created the substance of heaven, He intended part of that substance to be something bright called "light." **And there was light.** It does not say "and it was so," as we read elsewhere in this chapter, since the light did not remain in this original condition as did the other aspects of creation. (Our Sages have a profoundly mysterious midrash about this.) **[G]** Know that the "days" used to describe the creation

RASHBAM "their light is gone." **A wind from God sweeping over the water.** This too is a foreshadowing. It explains how the waters were "gathered" together in v. 9—by the wind blowing. The same thing happened during the exodus, when "the LORD drove back the sea with a strong east wind all that night, and turned the sea into dry ground" (Exod. 14:21).

3 God said, "Let there be light." To rectify "darkness over the surface of the deep" (v. 2).

IBN EZRA heaven and earth were created there was no place that could be settled. Everything was covered with water. After all, for (heavier) earth to sink below (lighter) water is the natural state of things. **A wind from God.** This wind is referred to as a "spirit" (OJPS) because it was sent to do God's will, drying up the water. **Sweeping.** That is, "blowing" over it, as in "*gliding* down to his young" (Deut. 32:11). **The water.** The Hebrew word is plural (or rather dual). This noun is sometimes masculine and sometimes feminine; **[H]** the singular form never occurs, though the word takes a singular verb in "the water of lustration was not dashed on him" (Num. 19:13,20).

3 God said. According to Saadia, "God said" here simply means "God willed." But if that were so, then (as Moses Gikatilla points out) the text should have read "God 'willed' *that* there be light." In fact, it means just what it says: "God said." We see exactly this in "By the word of the LORD the heavens were made" (Ps. 33:6) and "it was He who commanded that they be created" (Ps. 148:5). The point is that the creation was achieved effortlessly. Metaphorically, it is like a king who "does" things by means of his servants. This light, by the way, was above the wind.

[H] It is apparently treated as feminine in Isa. 15:9. But some think Ibn Ezra here is making a more profound point, about the upper and lower waters.

[F] The decoration on top of that letter, pointing upward. **[G]** Nahmanides is referring to a mystical version of the midrash cited in Rashi's comment to v. 4.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS the third thing that was created: darkness, which was indeed created, as we know from Isa. 45:7, "I form light and create darkness" (Bekhor Shor). Granted, we sometimes find dark fire when trees are burning. But that is because of the turbidity of the material; it does not mean that elemental fire is dark. Elemental fire is in fact not mentioned in this story, since no living creatures are made from it (Abarbanel). **Over the surface of the deep.** This was indeed the proper place for darkness, since light has no power over the deep, where darkness reigns eternal (Bekhor Shor). **A wind from God.** If this refers to the elemental air, why is it related to God here? None of the other three elements are. Moreover, the wind did not blow until Day Three. This is a rational spirit, the Separate Intelligences (Abarbanel). As Ps. 104:4 tells us, "He makes the winds His messengers"—these were the angels who move the sphere (Sforno).

3 God said. The Hebrew phrase occurs just 25 times in the Bible, 9 of them in this chapter and 10 more elsewhere in Genesis (Masorah). There were at this point no living creatures for Him to "say" it to; He said it in His heart, to Himself. It is natural for a person to express what he intends to do by saying so (Hizkuni). **Let there be light.** This "light" is the world of the angels, the light on the Way of Truth, the light of intelligence. This was the first stage of the world's coming into being (Gersonides).

NJPS light"; and there was light. 4God saw that the light was good, and God separated the light from the

OJPS there was light. 4And God saw the light, that it was good; and God divided the light from the

יְהִ֣י אֹ֑ור וַיְהִי־אֹ֖ור׃ 4 וַיַּ֤רְא אֱלֹהִים֙ אֶת־ הָאֹ֔ור כִּי־טֹ֑וב וַיַּבְדֵּ֣ל אֱלֹהִ֔ים בֵּ֥ין הָא�ֹ֖ור

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why are we told, "God saw that the light was good" (v. 4), rather than simply "And God saw that this was good" as it says elsewhere? ✦ Since darkness is simply the absence of light, what does "God separated the light from the darkness" mean? ✦ What is the connection between the two halves of v. 4? If the light had not been "good," would God not have separated it from the darkness but simply left the two of them dwelling together in brotherly love? Each of them can only exist in the absence of the other! ✦ Wouldn't v. 4 make more sense if it read, "God separated the light from the darkness, and God saw that the light was good"?

RASHI **4 God saw that the light was good, and God separated the light from the darkness.** Here too we need a midrash to explain it. God saw that the light was so "good" that it should not be used by the wicked. So God separated it for the use of the righteous in the World to Come. But the straightforward sense is this. God saw that the light was good, and that it was not seemly for it and the darkness to be mixed together indiscriminately. So He assigned each its own realm, day for the light and night for the darkness.

NAHMANIDES of heaven and earth were actual days, made of hours and minutes. There were six such days, just like the six workdays that make up a week, exactly as it says in plain Hebrew. But when one looks deeper into the matter, the "days" are the *sefirot* that emanate from on high. Every speech act that brought something into being was called a "day," and there were six of these. For "Yours, LORD, are *greatness, might, splendor, triumph,* and *majesty*—yes, all that is in heaven and on earth; to You, LORD, belong *kingship* and preeminence above all" (1 Chron. 29:11). **[H]** But the speech acts were 10 all told, **[I]** since the first of them did not have "days" associated with them. The explanation of the order of the verses describing this is both supernal and profound. Our understanding of them is less than a drop in the ocean.

4 God saw that the light was good. The comments of Rashi and Ibn Ezra are not correct. They would have God creating the light and then deciding whether or not it was good, just like a human being, who cannot tell the quality of anything until it is actually in existence. With creation, however, bringing things into being is referred to as "saying," and maintaining them in existence is referred to as "seeing." Compare "the woman saw that the tree was good for eating" (3:6), as well as Eccles. 4:4 and elsewhere in that book. (This usage occurs in rabbinic Hebrew as well; see B. Ket. 109a.) **[J]** In the case of creation, "seeing" implies that a thing's continued existence is in accordance with God's will. If God's will were to part company with anything for an instant, it would vanish into nothingness. Just as "God saw that" the work of each day "was good," and that the complete work was "very good" (v. 31), here too "seeing" that it was good implies that He wished it to continue to exist forever. Had our verse said simply that "this" was good, without specifically mentioning the light, we would have understood this to refer to the general creation of heaven and earth in v. 1. But God had not yet decreed their continued existence. In fact, they did not remain as they were—the expanse of heaven was formed on the second day and the waters parted on the third day so that the dry land, the "earth," could appear. Only then did God decree that their existence be permanent: "And God saw that this was good" (v. 10). **And God separated the light from the darkness.** This darkness is not the darkness of v. 2 (the fire)—it is simply the absence of light. For God created light in limited measure, so that for a while it would disappear and then return again. Some of the commentators think this light was created "facing" the Holy One—that is to say, in the west—and it set immediately for the length of a night and then rose and shone for the length of a day, making the "evening" and "morning" of v. 5. But this is completely wrong. It would add a mini-day to the six days of creation. It could be that the light was created "facing" Him in the sense that it was in His presence, not yet distributed among the four elements. "Separating" them would then mean providing each with its appropriate length of time, so the light remained before Him for the length of a night (since according to v. 5 "evening" came first), after which He caused it to shine on the four elements. It could also be that some amount of time passed after heaven and earth were created from nothing, for even though our time is measured by minutes and hours marked by light and darkness, time would have come into existence as soon as existence itself began. In that case, after heaven and earth were created, they might have stayed as they were for the length of one night without light. Then God said, "Let there be light," and there was light, which He decreed should remain for the same length of time and then vanish: "And there was evening and there was morning, a first day."

RASHBAM **4 God saw that the light was good.** OJPS translates literally, NJPS idiomatically. Note the same syntax in Exod. 2:2, where Moses' mother saw that *he* was "good." Though born after only six months (like Samuel in 1 Sam. 1:20), he already had a full head of hair. So she hid him for three months, until the full nine months of pregnancy would have been completed. The signs were good; she could see that even though he was born after just six months, he was not a miscarriage but would survive. **God separated the light from the darkness.** The first 12 hours were the day, and the next 12 the night—the light first, and afterward the darkness. After all, the first thing that happens in the creation story is the utterance, "Let there be light" (v. 3). The "darkness" of v. 2, which preceded this, was not "night."

IBN EZRA **4 God saw.** This is metaphorical, describing God's thought. Compare the use of the verb in Ecclesiastes: "I saw that wisdom is superior to folly as light is superior to darkness" (Eccles. 2:13; similarly in Eccles. 2:24, 4:4, and 5:17). **God separated the light from the darkness.** Rather, He "distinguished" them by giving them different names. In my opinion, this light was "day," albeit not like a sunny day but a cloudy one. The light was not very great when first created, but grew stronger day by day. On the second day it solidified the expanse and began to dry out the earth; on the third day it gave the earth the power to bring forth vegetation; on the fourth day it grew strong enough that the sun, moon, and stars could be seen; on the fifth day it enabled the water to bring forth animal life; on the sixth day it enabled the earth to bring forth animal life; and on the seventh day it reached its full strength. (This is in fact what Isa. 30:26 refers to.)

[H] Nahmanides is identifying the italicized words in that verse as *sefirot*. **[I]** The words "God said" appear 10 times in Genesis 1. **[J]** Nahmanides' point seems to be that "seeing" in these cases refers to having something in one's mind. God's "keeping [something] in mind" enables it to continue to exist.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **4 God saw.** This phrase occurs just nine times in the Bible: seven times in this chapter and also in 6:12 and Exod. 2:25 (Masorah). **And God separated the light from the darkness.** Not immediately, but when the creation of light was finished, on the fourth day (Hizkuni). If light and darkness had not been separated, it would be impossible to measure time. And note that this phrase also includes the various gradations of light and darkness (Abarbanel). He separated them gradually, with evening at nightfall and morning at the break of day (Sforno).

NJPS darkness. 5God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, a first day.

6God said, "Let there be an expanse in

OJPS darkness. 5And God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, one day.

6And God said: "Let there be a firma-

וּבֵין הַחֹשֶׁךְ׃ 5 וַיִּקְרָא אֱלֹהִים | לָאוֹר יוֹם
וְלַחֹשֶׁךְ קָרָא לָיְלָה וַיְהִי־עֶרֶב וַיְהִי־בֹקֶר
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6 וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יְהִי רָקִיעַ בְּתוֹךְ הַמָּיִם

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Doesn't "there was evening and there was morning" (v. 5) mean that day (resulting from the creation of light) came before night? ✦ Shouldn't it really have said: "there was night and there was day"? ✦ Why does it say "one day" (OJPS) rather than "a first day" (as NJPS mistranslates), like the other days? ✦ How could there have been three "days" before the sun and stars were created? ✦ Since the sky has already been created in v. 1, what was the "expanse in the midst of the water" (v. 6)?

RASHI **5 A first day.** Literally, "one day" (OJPS). Linguistically it should indeed have said "a first day," just as the other days have "second," "third," and so on. But as it stands the Hebrew phrase can be read not only as "a first day," but also as "a day of One." As Genesis Rabbah explains, on this day the Holy One was alone in His world. For the angels were not created until the second day.

6 Let there be an expanse. Even though the sky was created on the first day,

KIMHI **5 God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night.** Darkness is no more than the absence of light, but such an absence can certainly have a name: death, blindness, nakedness, foolishness, and so forth. **And there was evening and there was morning.** Evening is the period immediately after sunset. It is called "evening" (*erev*) because that is when the visual differences between things begin to even out; things "mix" together (*arev*). "Morning" (*boker*) is the time when things can once again be "examined" (*bakker*). **A first day.** The Hebrew literally says "one day" (OJPS), not "a first day"; there could not be a first without a second (which had not yet been made).

NAHMANIDES **5 God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night.** That is, time was created, and the measures of day and night were made. Ibn Ezra (in his comment to v. 8) explains that here—in contradistinction to what human beings do—they were "called," named, *before* they were created. In fact, "calling" here refers to their separation, when they took on their forms. As the midrash explains it, light was *assigned* to the day and darkness to the night. **And there was evening and there was morning, a first day.** Rather, "there was an evening and a morning of one day." See Ibn Ezra's explanation of the Hebrew for "evening" and "morning." Notice that our text specifically says "one day" (OJPS), not "a first day" (NJPS). The straightforward sense here is that a "first" must be followed by a "second," but that had not yet been made. "First" implies a comparison, but there was nothing else yet to compare it to. "One" does not carry any such implication. Some think "one day" alludes to the movement of the sky around the earth in 24 hours, since each moment is the beginning of morning somewhere on earth and of evening in the place opposite to it. But this would require a situation in which the "lights" of vv. 14–19 were already in their places in the sky.

6 Let there be an expanse. God is saying that the material originally created out of nothing in v. 1 should now become an expanse, stretched out like a tent in the middle

IBN EZRA **5 Night.** Note that *láilah* is not a feminine noun like most nouns with *–ah* endings; the accent is on the first syllable, the ending is extraneous, and this is always a masculine noun. **Evening.** Semantically, this is close to darkness; but the word *erev* is related etymologically to a verb meaning "mix" or "blend." It is the hour when shapes begin to blend together. **Morning.** The opposite of evening, when people begin to be able to distinguish different shapes from each other. **A first day.** Rather, "one day" (OJPS), one complete rotation of the heavenly sphere. Since light was named "Day," evening here certainly cannot be "day"; our verse is saying that there was first an evening (that is, a night) and then a morning, that is, a day. If the verse is just telling us that evening and morning together constituted a "day," what would be the point of saying this again about "a second day"? In my opinion, the explanation is that our verse is referring to the entire habitable area of the world, which covers 12 hours. When it is evening in the far east, it is still morning in the far west. I would add here that the midrash of the Sages that the world will last for 6,000 years, based on these six "days" of creation, has profound implications. **[I]**

6 An expanse. What Saadia says about this word is completely imaginary. The basic meaning of this root is "to stretch out." Notice that Isa. 40:22 says of the heavens (using a different verb) that God "stretched them out like a tent to dwell in." High marks to the sage

[I] See Ibn Ezra's comments to v. 14.

RASHBAM **5 God called the light Day.** You might be wondering (according to the apparent straightforward sense of the text) why the Holy One had to call light "Day" at the moment it was created. What Moses is telling us is this: Wherever the Holy One speaks of "day and night"—as in "Day and night shall not cease" (8:22)—it is a reference to the light and darkness that were created on the first day. The Holy One always calls them "day and night." That is what He named them. The same is true for everything that "God called" in this chapter. Similarly, when "Moses changed the name of Hosea son of Nun to Joshua" (Num. 13:16), he was doing what kings always do when they appoint people to positions in their household; they give them new names. "Pharaoh then gave Joseph the name Zaphenath-paneah" (41:45); "The chief officer gave them new names; he named Daniel Belteshazzar, Hananiah Shadrach, Mishael Meshach, and Azariah Abed-nego" (Dan. 1:7). **The darkness He called Night.** Note again that "day" always precedes "night." **And there was evening and there was morning.** This does not say "And there was night and there was day," but "And there was evening and there was morning." The first day drew toward evening and the light receded; subsequently, at the end of that night, the morning dawned, and the first of the "six days" during which "the LORD made heaven and earth and sea" (Exod. 20:11) was complete. Then, in the morning, the second day began, and "God said, 'Let there be an expanse'" (v. 6). **A first day.** Rather, "one day." But the text is *not* saying that the evening and the morning constituted one day; it is explaining that, for each of the six days, once night was over and morning dawned, one day was finished and the next began.

6 God said. In the morning, after the first day was complete. **Let there be an**

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **5 God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night.** Even though they were not the same as what we call "day" and "night" now (Sforno). **And there was evening and there was morning.** "Evening" here refers to the original darkness, before the creation of light. Here, as on every subsequent day of the six, two things were created, one on a "morning" level and one on an "evening" level (Abarbanel).

6 Let there be an expanse. The creation of the spheres was the second stage of the world's coming into being (Gersonides).

NJPS the midst of the water, that it may separate water from water." 7God made the expanse, and it separated the water which was below the expanse from the water which was above the expanse. And it was so. 8God called the

OJPS ment in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters." 7And God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament; and it was so. 8And God called the firma-

וִיהִי מַבְדִּיל בֵּין מַיִם לָמָיִם׃ 7 וַיַּעַשׂ
אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָרָקִיעַ וַיַּבְדֵּל בֵּין הַמַּיִם
אֲשֶׁר מִתַּחַת לָרָקִיעַ וּבֵין הַמַּיִם אֲשֶׁר
מֵעַל לָרָקִיעַ וַיְהִי־כֵן׃ 8 וַיִּקְרָא אֱלֹהִים

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Since the expanse was "in the midst of the water," what is the point of saying that it would "separate water from water"? ✦ Why did God have to "make" the expanse (v. 7) after having said "Let there be an expanse"? Nahmanides' comment about Ben Zoma only confuses the issue: "God made" something on Days Two, Four, and Six, but not on Days One, Three, and Five! ✦ Did "it" (the expanse) separate the waters, as NJPS translates, or did He, God, separate them, as OJPS has it? The Hebrew could mean either. ✦ What was "the water which was above the expanse"? ✦ Since we've already been told that it happened, why add "And it was so"? Note that on (e.g.) Day Four, "God made" (v. 16) explains how "it was so" (v. 15); our verse has them in reverse order.

RASHI it did not solidify until the second day, at a blast from the Holy One, when He said, "Let there be an expanse." Job 26:11 describes these two days. "The pillars of heaven tremble" refers to the first day, after which, on the second day, they were "astounded at His blast," just like a man who is frozen in his tracks by a blast from someone who is threatening him. **In the midst of the water.** Rather, "in between the waters." There is a space between the upper waters and the expanse, just as there is between the expanse and the lower waters on the earth. You therefore learn that the waters above the expanse are suspended there by order of the King.

7 God made the expanse. That is, He set it up on its pillars; this constituted "making" it. The verb is used this way in Deut. 21:12, where the captive woman "does" her nails, grows them out. **Above the expanse.** Not "on" the expanse, but "above" it. Again, this water was suspended in the air. — As to why "God saw that this was good" was not said on the second day, that is because the job involving the water was not finished until the third day. But it was already started on the second day. Something unfinished is not completely ready and cannot be judged to be "good." But on the third day, when not only was the job involving the water finished, but He also began and completed a second job, we find "God saw that this was good" twice: once for the completion of the second day's job and once for the completion of the third day's own job.

8 God called the expanse Sky. That is, *shamayim*, the same word translated

RASHBAM expanse. The Hebrew noun is derived from a passive verb; a "firmament" is something that has been "firmed up." Remember that from the earth up to the heavens was all water (see v. 2). Now the Holy One separated these upper waters with a solid expanse stretching from east to west and from north to south. Because the final arrangement of the water was not complete until the third day, when it was "gathered into one area" (v. 9), "God saw that this was good" was not said at all on the second day, but was said twice on the third day, once when the water was finished and once when the trees and plants appeared. **That it may separate water from water.** Half above it and half below.

8 God called the expanse Sky. As I

IBN EZRA who said that the far end of the sky meets the far end of the ocean. For this "expanse" is the air. When the light hit the earth, a dry wind arose from the earth and the flame of the light turned the air into the expanse. Psalm 104 says essentially the same thing: "You spread the heavens like a tent cloth" (v. 2). V. 3 there goes on to mention the clouds and the wind, and then v. 5 explains, "He established the earth on its foundations," above the water: "He founded it upon the ocean" (Ps. 24:2); "Who spread the earth over the water" (Ps. 136:6). That is why seafarers are called those who "go down" to the sea (e.g., Ps. 107:23). When Amos says that the Holy One "summons the waters of the sea and pours them out upon the earth" (Amos 5:8, 9:6), this is not "the water" but the clouds.

7 It separated the water which was below the expanse from the water which was above the expanse. Note that in Hebrew (if translated literally) one can separate "*between* X *to* Y" (e.g., v. 6 and similarly Ezek. 44:23); "*between* X and *between* Y" (as in our verse); or, using both, "*between* X *to between* Y" (e.g., Isa. 59:2). **And it was so.** This phrase introduces v. 8: "When it was so, God called the expanse Sky."

8 God called the expanse Sky. God

KIMHI **8 God called the expanse Sky.** Metaphorically. Like the upper heavens, it too was stretched over the earth like a dome.

NAHMANIDES of the water. This may have been what Rav intended when he said that "let there be an expanse" means "let an expanse—a 'firmament' [OJPS]—harden"; R. Judah b. Simon describes it as a "casing" for the expanse, citing the related verb in "They *hammered out* sheets of gold" (Exod. 39:3). **In the midst of the water.** Literally in the middle of it, in between the upper waters and the lower waters. And just as there is some separation between the firmament and the waters on earth, so too there is some separation between the firmament and the waters above. You thus learn that they are suspended there by God's word (see Genesis Rabbah and Rashi's comment). All this is part of the Account of Creation. Do not expect me to write any of that down for you. It is one of the concealed mysteries of the Torah. The text does not require any explanation of that; it does not dwell at length on that aspect of creation. In any case, a full explanation is forbidden even to those who know the Account of Creation, let alone to us.

7 God made the expanse. "Making" always implies putting something that already exists into its proper arrangement. **And it was so.** Compare v. 3, which repeats what God "said" exactly to demonstrate that light came into being. Here, by contrast, "let there be" is followed by God making the expanse, which separates the waters. Why was it necessary to add "and it was so"? To say that "it was so" permanently, as long as earth lasts. (Ibn Ezra's comment is incorrect.) In Genesis Rabbah, Ben Zoma caused a commotion by challenging this verse: "Didn't the expanse come into being by means of 'let there be'? 'By the word of the LORD the heavens were made' [Ps. 33:6]!" But "God made" things on the fourth and sixth days too. **[K]** Ben Zoma's problem was that on the other days we are simply told, "And it was so," whereas here, after "God said" of v. 6, we are told that "God made the expanse" *and* that "it was so." That was his difficulty. He may have had some secret explanation he did not wish to reveal. But that was the point of the commotion.

8 God called the expanse Sky. God did not name "Heaven" (OJPS)—the same word used in v. 1—until the second day, when He

[K] Our texts of Nahmanides add the "fifth" day, but this is a scribal error.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **7 God made.** This phrase occurs only here, in vv. 16 and 25, and in Judg. 6:40 (Masorah). **It separated the water which was below the expanse from the water which was above the expanse.** Rather, "God separated the water which was below the expanse *and* the water which was above the expanse," each into separate levels (Abarbanel).

NJPS expanse Sky. And there was evening and there was morning, a second day.

9God said, "Let the water below the sky be gathered into one area, that the dry land

לָרָקִיעַ שָׁמָיִם וַיְהִי־עֶרֶב וַיְהִי־בֹקֶר יוֹם שֵׁנִי׃ פ

9 וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יִקָּווּ הַמַּיִם מִתַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם אֶל־מָקוֹם אֶחָד וְתֵרָאֶה הַיַּבָּשָׁה

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ If the expanse was created from the water—a material substance—why does God call it "Heaven" (v. 8, OJPS)? Despite NJPS, the Hebrew word is the same as in v. 1. ✦ Why is "this was good" not said in connection with Day Two as it is on all the other days? ✦ How do we reconcile "Let the water below the sky be gathered into one area" (v. 9) with the fact that the water is not actually gathered into one area but is found in various seas, rivers, and streams? (The text itself calls this "area" by the plural "Seas" in v. 10.) ✦ Why are we not told that "the water below the sky was gathered into one area, and the dry land appeared," following the pattern on other days?

RASHI "heaven" in v. 1. The Hebrew word can also be read as *sa mayim*, "hold water"; *sham mayim*, "water is there"; and *esh-mayim*, "fire and water," which He mixed together to make *shamayim*, "sky."

9 Let the water below the sky be gathered into one area. Up to that point, the water was spread evenly over the entire earth. Now, He gathered them into the Ocean, the great sea that is so much bigger than all the other seas on earth.

NAHMANIDES had clothed it in the form of a firmament, though it had already been created on the first day. The Hebrew word, *shamayim*, is the equivalent of *she-mayim* ("which is water"; see Song 1:7 for another example of *sha-* instead of *she-*). The name reveals the secret of Heaven's creation. "It was water" that was stretched and hammered out in the midst of the upper and lower waters. On B. Hag. 12a we find a different explanation: *sham mayim*, "Water is there." But there is no indication of a double מ in the word, as there is (for example) of the doubled ב in the name Jerubbaal. (Another explanation is that it is *shem mayim*, "a[nother] name for water" in this new form.) From Rashi's perspective, to say that "it was water" that hardened into the firmament is the straightforward sense of the text, and it follows Rav's understanding (see my comment to "Let there be an expanse" of v. 6). This means that they were called "heaven and earth" in v. 1 after the names that they would eventually have. How else could one say it? But it is more correct—still according to the straightforward sense of the text—to say that "heaven" of v. 1 is the upper heaven, beyond the Chariot and having nothing to do with the spheres: **[L]** "Above the heads of the creatures was a form: an *expanse*, with an awe-inspiring gleam as of crystal, was spread out above their heads" (Ezek. 1:22). This is why the Holy One is described as "riding through the heavens" (Deut. 33:26). The text gives us no details about the creation of this upper heaven, just as it tells us nothing about the creation of the angels, the creatures of the Chariot, **[M]** or anything else that has no physical body. It just tells us that this heaven was "created," implying "from nothing." The Sky named here on the second day was made of water, as described in v. 6. This physical heaven was named after the original heaven created in v. 1. Its being an "expanse" or "firmament" clearly distinguishes it from the "heaven" of v. 1; see again Genesis Rabbah. The discussion there refers to the spheres, which have both lower heavens and upper heavens: "Praise Him, sun and moon, praise Him, all bright stars. Praise Him, highest heavens, and you waters that are above the heavens" (Ps. 148:3). But the throne of the Holy One is in the "heaven" of v. 1: "The heaven is My throne and the earth is My footstool" (Isa. 66:1). They are mentioned at the beginning of the psalm: "Praise the LORD from the heavens; praise Him on high. Praise Him, all His angels, praise Him, all His hosts" (Ps. 148:1–2). Again, all this is a correct interpretation of the straightforward sense of our text, though there is much more to be said about the name of heaven and the name of the throne—a lofty and profound mystery. For there is a heaven above the heaven and a throne above the throne. This is what the Sages meant by saying that one recites the Shema "in order to accept upon oneself the yoke of the kingdom of heaven" (M. Ber. 2:2). If one has sufficient merit, one will find all this and more implied in v. 1. Once more: the creation of v. 1 was from nothing; everything else was made from that original material. **[N]**

9 Let the water below the sky be gathered into one area, that the dry land may appear. The "deep" (v. 2) was a mixture of water and earth, a kind of muck. Here, God decreed that the water should withdraw on every side and that the earth of that mixture should rise until it appeared above the water and then dry out. It would thereby become a stretch of dry land suitable for habitation. Note that Ps. 136:6 calls God the one "who spread the earth over the water." Or perhaps the earthen part is a sort of rounded ball, of

[L] See Special Topics, "Medieval Jewish Philosophy." **[M]** See Ezekiel 1. **[N]** Nahmanides goes on to explain that R. Eliezer the Great's saying that the heavens were created from the light of the Holy One's garment is in fact compatible with his own explanation.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **8 A second day.** This phrase is unique (Masorah).

OJPS ment Heaven. And there was evening and there was morning, a second day.

9And God said: "Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear." And

RASHBAM explained in my comment to v. 5, this means that God calls this expanse "Sky" throughout the Torah. But though "heaven" and "sky" are the same word in Hebrew, the "Sky" above this expanse—the one that already exists in v. 1—is referred to in the Bible by a special Hebrew phrase, "the heaven of heavens," as in "the heavens to their uttermost reaches belong to the LORD your God" (Deut. 10:14); "You alone are the LORD. You made the heavens, the highest heavens, and all their host" (Neh. 9:6). **There was evening and there was morning, a second day.** The day drew on toward evening, and then, for the second time, the morning broke, completing the second of the "six days" (Exod. 20:11) of creation and beginning the third day.

9 God said, "Let the water below the sky be gathered into one area." As I explained in my comment to v. 2, this was done by means of the wind blowing, just as the sea was split during the exodus. Note also that these lower waters are gathered by the action of the wind just as the upper waters were split by the firmament. **That the dry land may appear.** This "land" is the "earth" of v. 1; this is the earth that, as I explained in my comment to in v. 1, had been created, along with the (upper)

IBN EZRA called five things by name before man was around to name things: light and darkness (v. 5), heaven (here) and earth (v. 10), and the seas (also v. 10). And of course man himself as well (5:2).

9 God said, "Let the water below the sky be gathered into one area, that the dry land may appear." For "gathered," compare "all nations shall *assemble* there" (Jer. 3:17). In my opinion, this is a continuation of v. 7; the Hebrew of our verse must mean "God *had* said." The expanse was not made until the earth dried up. We can see that both were made on the same day from "the day that the LORD God made earth and heaven" (2:4, OJPS). (Notice that they are "made," not "created"; causing something that was hidden to appear, or gathering together something that was scattered, is not an act of "creation.") There are hundreds of cases in the Torah where a past tense (like "said") is really a pluperfect ("had said"); I will give you just two, both in this parashah. First, "the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and placed there the man whom He had formed" (2:8), which is followed in 2:9 by a description of how He *had* caused the garden to grow; second, 2:17, where God commands the man not to eat

NJPS may appear." And it was so. 10God called the dry land Earth, and the gathering of waters He called Seas. And God saw that this was good. 11And God said, "Let the earth sprout vegetation: seed-bearing plants, fruit trees of every kind on earth

OJPS it was so. 10And God called the dry land Earth, and the gathering together of the waters called He Seas; and God saw that it was good. 11And God said: "Let the earth put forth grass, herb yielding seed, and fruit-tree bearing fruit after its kind,

וַיְהִי־כֵן׃ 10 וַיִּקְרָ֨א אֱלֹהִ֜ים ׀ לַיַּבָּשָׁה֙ אֶ֔רֶץ
וּלְמִקְוֵ֥ה הַמַּ֖יִם קָרָ֣א יַמִּ֑ים וַיַּ֣רְא אֱלֹהִ֔ים
כִּי־טֽוֹב׃ 11 וַיֹּ֣אמֶר אֱלֹהִ֗ים תַּדְשֵׁ֤א הָאָ֙רֶץ֙
דֶּ֣שֶׁא עֵ֔שֶׂב מַזְרִ֖יעַ זֶ֑רַע עֵ֚ץ פְּרִ֣י עֹשֶׂ֔ה פְּרִ֕י

RASHI **10 The gathering of waters He called Seas.** Of course, all this water is one great sea. But the taste of a fish that comes up from the water at Acre differs from the taste of a fish that is pulled out of the sea further up the coast. **[B]**

11 Let the earth sprout vegetation. The verb "sprout" comes from the same Hebrew root as the noun "vegetation." This is the collective word for all the various kinds of vegetation, each of which individually is called a "plant." (That noun does not have a verb associated with it in Biblical Hebrew.) By the same token, one cannot say "this vegetation" or "that vegetation"; it is a general word, used for the greenery that covers the earth. This expression therefore means, "Let the earth be completely covered with a garment of plants," that is, herbage of all kinds mixed together, each individual one of which is called a "plant." **Seed-bearing plants.** Literally, "seed-seeding." Each plant

[B] Rashi uses a second place name, sometimes identified as "Spain," but his source is clearly referring to a location (perhaps no longer identifiable) in Lebanon or Syria, north of Acre.

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why did God call the dry land "Earth" rather than "soil" or "dirt" or something of the sort? "Earth" would seem to consist of everything that is not part of "Heaven," including water, air, and fire. ✦ Why is "God saw that this was good" said twice on Day Three (vv. 10 and 12) rather than just once as it is on Days One, Four, Five, and Six? ✦ For that matter, what does it mean to say that God "saw" it was good, as if He did not realize it until then? ✦ Isn't it redundant to say "fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit" (v. 11)?

RASHBAM heaven, at some point before the action of our chapter begins.

10 God called the dry land Earth. Again, this "dry land" is what the word "earth" is referring to throughout the Torah.

11 Let the earth sprout vegetation. The Hebrew word is a collective noun referring to plant life of every kind; each particular kind is referred to as a "plant." **Seed-bearing plants, fruit trees of every kind.** The straightforward sense of the Hebrew is

IBN EZRA from the tree of knowledge, followed by 2:19, describing how He *had* formed the animals and birds (which of course happened before the man came into being).

10 The gathering of waters He called Seas. In the plural. It is not as if there is one single piece of land surrounded by one single sea. **And God saw that this was good.** According to the explanation I have given in my comment to v. 9, this must refer to the creative work of Day Two: God *had seen* that this was good. Alternatively, the earth was simply not good and dry enough to bring forth vegetation by the end of the second day.

11 Let the earth sprout vegetation. This is the beginning of the work of the third day. The correct understanding of this Hebrew phrase—like those in vv. 20 and 24—is that the Holy One put into the earth and

KIMHI **11 God said, "Let the earth sprout vegetation."** "Sprout" and "vegetation" come from the same root in Hebrew, referring to the beginning of growth. **Seed-bearing plants.** The sprouts are called plants when they reach their full growth. **Of every kind.** The phrase applies to the plants as well as the trees. (Our Sages were of a different opinion.) **[B]**

[B] See Rashi's comment to v. 12.

NAHMANIDES which most is still sunk below the surface of the water, as the Greeks imagine in their discussions (which may or may not be correct). Notice that these two clauses are two separate "sayings" (that is, expressions of God's will), both of them contrary to the laws of nature. Ordinarily one would expect the (heavier) earth to sink and be "gathered into one area" with the water surrounding and covering it. But here it is the water (which filled the entire world below the firmament) that sinks and the dry land that "appears."

10 God called the dry land Earth. He named them once they were clothed in these forms. Previously, they had been referred to as "the deep." The dry land is given the name "Earth," matching the one element for which all four were created, because it would serve as habitation for humankind, the only created beings who actually recognize their Creator. **And the gathering of waters He called Seas.** "Seas" is *yammim*, as if to say *yam-mayim*, "a sea of water." That is, the sea is what *contains* the water: "As water covers the sea" (Isa. 11:9). Notice that the huge water tank in the Temple was also called a "sea" (as in the Hebrew throughout 1 Kings 7), since it was a "gathering" of waters. **And God saw that this was good.** "This" being their continued existence in accordance with His will. Once He clothed them in these forms, they accorded with His will and He made their existence permanent, as I explained in my comment to v. 4. As our Sages say, this is why that is expression is not used on the second day of creation—the work of arranging the water was not yet finished. So on the third day there are two occasions to say "this was good," one for the water and one for the work belonging to that day.

11 And God said, "Let the earth sprout vegetation." He decreed that part of earth's nature would be that it would have the power to sprout and bring forth seed, so that each species could subsequently reproduce on its own forever. It could be that "earth" here actually refers to the "earth" of v. 1; certainly the four elements derive from it, and the various plants sprouted from them in the garden of Eden and from there throughout the world. As the rabbinic saying has it, "There is no blade of grass down below without its own star in the sky, which strikes it and tells it, 'Grow!'" That is the background to "Do you know the laws of heaven or impose its authority on earth?" (Job 38:33). What Rashi says about "vegetation" and "plant" is not correct; if it were, "vegetation" could not occur in the plural, yet in rabbinic literature we do find this Hebrew word in the plural. (In fact, Rashi's own Hebrew comment uses the word in the plural.) What our verse is

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **10 God called the dry land Earth.** Note that there is no special act of creation for the various gases, minerals, and metals; the basic elements combined to make these on their own (Abarbanel). Naming the part for the whole (Sforno). **And God saw that this was good.** Despite the apparent insult to the water, this was good because there was a significant purpose for moving it off the land (Abarbanel).

11 Let the earth sprout vegetation. And not "God created vegetation." Unlike the other creations, this one came into being incomplete (Gersonides). **Seed-bearing plants, fruit trees.** Plants are a lesser category than trees, since many plants arise from decay (Gersonides). Three kinds are mentioned here: vegetation, which sprouts on its own; seed-bearing plants, which must be sown yearly; and trees, which last for many years. As to Nahmanides' puzzlement that only "fruit" trees are mentioned, you must realize that all trees

NJPS that bear fruit with the seed in it." And it was so. 12The earth brought forth vegetation: seed-bearing plants of every kind, and trees of every kind bearing fruit with the seed in it. And God saw that this was good. 13And there was evening and there was morning, a third day.

14God said, "Let there be lights in the

OJPS wherein is the seed thereof, upon the earth." And it was so. 12And the earth brought forth grass, herb yielding seed after its kind, and tree bearing fruit, wherein is the seed thereof, after its kind; and God saw that it was good. 13And there was evening and there was morning, a third day.

14And God said: "Let there be lights in

לְמִינֹו אֲשֶׁר זַרְעוֹ־בֹו עַל־הָאָרֶץ וַיְהִי־כֵן׃
12 וַתּוֹצֵא הָאָרֶץ דֶּשֶׁא עֵשֶׂב מַזְרִיעַ זֶרַע
לְמִינֵהוּ וְעֵץ עֹשֶׂה פְּרִי אֲשֶׁר זַרְעוֹ־בֹו
לְמִינֵהוּ וַיַּרְא אֱלֹהִים כִּי־טֹוב׃ 13 וַיְהִי־
עֶרֶב וַיְהִי־בֹקֶר יֹום שְׁלִישִׁי׃ פ
14 וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יְהִי מְאֹרֹת

RASHI would grow its own seed, which could be planted somewhere else. **Fruit trees.** So called because the tree itself tasted the same as the fruit. This is what the earth was told to bring forth, but it did not; it brought forth "trees of every kind *bearing* fruit" (v. 12). So when Adam was cursed for his sin, the earth was cursed too for its sin. **[C] With the seed in it.** The pits inside each fruit, from which another tree grows when they are planted.

12 The earth brought forth vegetation: seed-bearing plants of every kind. Rather, "after its kind" (OJPS). Even though the plants were not commanded to come forth each "after its kind," they heard that the trees were commanded to do so and reasoned that it was even more important to God that they themselves do so. (This is fully explained on B. Hul. 60a.)

14 Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky. They were created on the first day, and on the fourth day He commanded that they be suspended in the sky. In fact, all the "generations" of the heaven and of the

[C] See 3:17.

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why are we not told about the creation of the various gases and other inorganic substances—the metals and so forth? ✦ Why are the days of creation so different? Here God "creates," there He "makes"; sometimes we are merely told, "it was so." And now we have a fourth variety: God speaks, and then one of the creations does the work itself: "The earth brought forth vegetation" (v. 12). All these variations demand explanation. ✦ Why was it necessary to create the sun on the fourth day (v. 14) when there was already light? If the light created on Day One continued to exist for all the first seven days of creation, as Rashi says, there was no need to create the sun until the end of Day Seven. If the original light lasted only for the first three days, as Nahmanides says, we must still ask why. It seems more natural that the sun would be created either on the first day or at the end of the first week. ✦ Why do we find "Let there be" (v. 14) only here and in vv. 3 and 6, but nowhere else in the story of creation?

RASHBAM obviously "herb yielding seed and fruit-tree bearing fruit, [each] after its kind" (compare OJPS). "After its kind" refers both to the plants and to the trees. The point is that an apple tree would produce apples and not dates (and so forth). **That bear fruit with the seed in it.** An apple (or any other kind of fruit) contains seeds from which one can grow a new tree of the same kind.

14 Let there be lights. "Let there be" is a singular verb in Hebrew, but this is a standard idiom in Biblical Hebrew. It is as much as to say, "let this thing be: lights." **In the expanse of the sky.** "In" the sky of vv. 6–8, and therefore *beneath* the upper heavens of v. 1. **To separate day from night.** V. 4 has

IBN EZRA the sea the power to fulfill these commands. These are the "generations" of 2:4 (OJPS). **[J] With the seed in it.** The seed is in the fruit. In this way, each plant continues its own species.

14 Let there be lights. The verb is technically singular, but this verb is so common that the masculine singular form is regularly used for both singular and plural and even (see Deut. 22:23) for the feminine. **The expanse of the sky.** Mar Hassan—a "great" Spanish scholar—says the expanse has eight spheres, one for each of the planets and one for the constellations. But this

[J] Ibn Ezra may instead (or also) be saying that these verbs describe the "nature" of the earth and the sea.

KIMHI **12 And God saw that this was good.** Even plants that are not good to eat or drink may be good for healing.

14 Lights. As I said in my comment to v. 3, these lights were created with the spheres on Day One, but their light could not penetrate to earth. The expanse could not yet receive it, nor could the earth, which was not yet as dry as it would need to be. But by day four everything was ready for the lights to operate on earth as needed to make the plants grow:

NAHMANIDES really saying is this: "Let the earth sprout *sprouts* [that will grow into] *plants* that produce seed." As in English, one could not say, "Let the earth *plant* plants." **Fruit trees.** Even a tree can be described as a "sprout" when it first sprouts from the earth, and our verse indeed uses that expression. The trees are not "brought forth" separately. Notice the parallelism in "For the pastures in the wilderness are clothed with *grass* [compare OJPS to our verse]. The *trees* have borne their fruit" (Joel 2:22). It is surprising, though, that our verse mentions specifically fruit trees and not any other kind of tree. This may be what prompted the Sages to say that originally every kind of tree bore edible fruit. If this is so, we would have to say that "Cursed be the ground" (3:17) turned most of the trees into non-fruit-bearing ones. Or perhaps the "vegetation" at the beginning of the verse refers to nonedible plants and trees. **Of every kind.** Rather, "after its kind" (OJPS). This prohibits interbreeding. One who plants hybrids acts in opposition to the work of creation. With God's help, I will explain this further elsewhere. **[O]**

12 Trees of every kind bearing fruit with the seed in it. We learn that all trees can sprout from seeds, even though today the custom with some of them is to propagate a cutting. **And God saw that this was good.** "This" being the ability of species to perpetuate themselves. Notice that bringing forth vegetation was not special enough to be given a separate day of its own; the earth is the earth, whether it is fertile or barren.

14 Let there be lights. Light, of course, was created on the first day, and it was shining on the four elements. When the firmament was made, on the second day, it interposed between the light and the lower elements. When the dry land was created on the third day it was, therefore, dark and not lit. Now, on the fourth day, the Holy One wanted there to be lights in the sky that would enable light to reach the ground. Up to this point, the light was above the firmament and could not "shine upon the earth" (v. 15). These lights were to "be" made from the material created as heaven on the first day, when, as you remember, there was a day's worth of light. Now the Holy One

[O] See Nahmanides' comment to "You shall not let your cattle mate with a different kind" (Lev. 19:19).

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS bear fruit of some kind; those that are not edible have other uses (Abarbanel). **Of every kind.** The Hebrew expression—really "after its kind" (OJPS)—occurs 4 times with the short form of the suffix used here and 14 times with the longer form used twice in v. 12 (Masorah).

14 Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky. They were created on the fourth day because the animals, which would begin to be created on the fifth, depend on sunlight. The "light" created on the first day was bright, but not hot (Abarbanel). The animals were

NJPS expanse of the sky to separate day from night; they shall serve as signs for the set times—the days

OJPS the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days and years;

הַשָּׁמַיִם לְהַבְדִּיל בֵּין הַיּוֹם וּבֵין הַלָּיְלָה
וְהָיוּ לְאֹתֹת וּלְמוֹעֲדִים וּלְיָמִים וְשָׁנִים׃

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why are the lights created "in the expanse of the sky," when in v. 8 we are told that the "expanse" is the sky? ✦ Why are the lights needed "to separate day from night"? Was there really no distinction between day and night up to this time? V. 5 tells us that there was, and so does "there was evening and there was morning" in vv. 5, 8, and 13. ✦ Why are the lights called "signs," as if they were pointing to causes, when in fact (as the astronomers tell us) they themselves are the causes of what happens here below? ✦ As long as the text is telling us the benefits provided us by the heavenly bodies, why are their effects on life here below—as described (e.g.) in "the bounteous yield of the sun, and the bounteous crop of the moons" (Deut. 33:14)—not mentioned in the creation story? This is the most substantial benefit of all. ✦ Why do the "seasons" (OJPS) come before the days? Wouldn't the order "days, seasons, years" make more sense?

RASHI earth (2:4, OJPS) were created on the first day, and each creation was put in place on the day assigned to it. The object marker *et* used in v. 1 can also mean "with"; that verse implies that the "generations" of heaven and earth were created "with" them at that time. In our verse, notice that the Hebrew word for lights is missing the usual ו of the plural. That permits it also to be read as "curse," because Wednesday is cursed with the danger that children will come down with croup. As we read on B. Ta'an. 27b, "On Wednesday the men of the watch on duty would fast so that croup would not attack the children." **To separate day from night**. Once the original light of the first day was hidden away. But during the first three days of the week of creation, **[D]** the original light and darkness served together, both by day and by night. **They shall serve as signs**. When the lights are eclipsed, it is considered a bad sign But as Jeremiah told the Israelites, "Do not be dismayed by *portents* in the sky" (Jer. 10:2). When you do the will of the Holy One, you will not need to worry about punishment. **For the set times**. In the future, when the Israelites would be commanded about the set times and they count up to them from the new moon. **The days**. The sun for half the day and the moon for half,

[D] Various versions of Rashi's comment refer here to three, six, or seven days.

RASHBAM already told us that "God separated the light from the darkness." But up to this point, day and night simply ended; they were not yet precisely marked by the rising and setting of the sun (and the stars), as they now would be. **They shall serve as signs**. As in "This is the sign for you from the LORD that the LORD will do the thing that He has promised: Shall the shadow advance ten steps or recede ten steps?" (2 Kings 20:9), where also Isaiah proposed that the sun be a "sign" for Hezekiah; see also "do not be dismayed by *portents* in the sky" (Jer. 10:2) and (using a different Hebrew word) "I will set portents in the sky" (Joel 3:3). **For the set times**. The "set times" of the festivals (used also for dates on contracts) are marked by the progress of the moon, which is new again every 29½ days: "He made the moon to mark the *seasons*" (Ps. 104:19). **The days**. From one

KIMHI "He brings everything to pass precisely at its time" (Eccles. 3:11). **The expanse of the sky**. The air (see v. 20). **To separate day from night**. Previously, there had been light only during the day, and complete darkness at night. Now that the lights were in the sky, it was necessary "to separate day from night" by making the great light serve the day and the lesser light the night, not to mention their other separate purposes: "the bounteous yield of the sun, and the bounteous crop of the moons" (Deut. 33:14). **As signs for the set times—the days and the years**. Rather, "for signs, and for seasons, and for days and years" (OJPS). The "signs" are the hours; the "seasons" are the equinoxes and

IBN EZRA is impossible. There is no material object beyond the sphere of the constellations. **[K]** There is only a higher heaven, as we learn from "the expanse of the sky," as well as from "the heavens, the heaven of heavens" (Neh. 9:6) and "Him who rides the ancient highest heavens" (Ps. 68:34). But Saadia (of blessed memory) was afraid to explain the meaning of "ancient" in this latter phrase, though it is a rabbinic text that tells us that the Holy One created 18,000 worlds—which is true, though not literally so. (The intelligent person will understand.) In my opinion, the sun, moon, and stars are said to be "in the expanse" because that is where they appear to us to be. In fact, they are in seven different spheres. They cannot all be on a single sphere or they would not be able to eclipse each other. **Signs**. That is, the minutes; the **set times** would then be the hours. If "signs" is really the correct translation, then it refers to eclipses of the sun and moon and to comets. According to this understanding, the "signs" would correspond to the "portents in the sky" of Jer. 10:2. Some think that the preposition "as" or "for" (OJPS) should simply be ignored: "they shall be

[K] Ibn Ezra's objection is apparently to the idea that the expanse consists of the spheres.

NAHMANIDES decreed that the light should take shape and form a material body to shine on the earth during the day and a second such body to shine at night. The two of them were hung in the firmament so that their light could shine below it. Perhaps, just as earth was given the power to sprout vegetation at various places, the firmament too was enabled to receive light at certain locations by means of these bodies, which could receive light and transmit it, like crystals. Note that the Hebrew word for these lights (*ma'or*) differs from the word for light itself (*or*), though Ps. 136:7, "Who made the great lights," uses the latter word. **To separate day from night**. I don't think what Rashi says is really what the Sages meant by "hiding away" the original light. What they thought was that the original light shone for three days, after which, on the fourth day, the two great lights were made of it. As we read in Genesis Rabbah, "The sun is a substandard form of the light on high." Since this world is not capable of using that light without an intermediary, it was cached away for the righteous in the World to Come. This ersatz light has been in use since the fourth day of creation. Genesis Rabbah explains why "the light of the seven days" (Isa. 30:26) does not contradict this sequence of events: "The seven days" refers to this first week—it is not an enumeration. R. Judah b. Simon says further there that the Holy One "separated" the light for Himself, but the Sages say that He separated it for the righteous. If you can understand their formulation in the blessing over the new moon, where the moon is called "a crown of glory to those supported [by God] since leaving the womb," **[P]** you will understand the mystery of this original light, its being separated from the darkness and cached away. You will further understand the mystery of the two kings using a single crown **[Q]** and of Isa. 30:26. **They shall serve as signs**. The unusual phenomena they bring about will do this: "I will set portents in the sky and on earth: blood and fire and pillars of smoke" (Joel 3:3). Jeremiah too uses the phrase "portents in the sky" (Jer. 10:2). **For the set times**. Rather, the "seasons"

[P] See Isa. 46:3. **[Q]** See Rashi's comments to v. 16.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS more worthy of this light than the plants (Sforno). **They shall serve as signs**. The "signs" are the weeks—which are a sign that God created the world in six days and rested on the seventh; remember that, according to Exod. 31:13,

NJPS and the years; [15]and they shall serve as lights in the expanse of the sky to shine upon the earth." And it was so. [16]God made the two great lights, the greater light to dominate the day and the lesser light to dominate the night, and the stars. [17]And God set them in the

[15] וְהָיוּ לִמְאוֹרֹת֙ בִּרְקִ֣יעַ הַשָּׁמַ֔יִם לְהָאִ֖יר
עַל־הָאָ֑רֶץ וַיְהִי־כֵֽן׃ [16] וַיַּ֣עַשׂ אֱלֹהִ֔ים אֶת־
שְׁנֵ֥י הַמְּאֹרֹ֖ת הַגְּדֹלִ֑ים אֶת־הַמָּאֹ֤ור הַגָּדֹל֙
לְמֶמְשֶׁ֣לֶת הַיֹּ֔ום וְאֶת־הַמָּאֹ֥ור הַקָּטֹ֖ן
לְמֶמְשֶׁ֣לֶת הַלַּ֑יְלָה וְאֵ֥ת הַכֹּוכָבִֽים׃ [17] וַיִּתֵּ֥ן

OJPS [15]and let them be for lights in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth." And it was so. [16]And God made the two great lights: the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night; and the stars. [17]And God set them in the

RASHI making a full day. **And the years.** After 365 days, the lights would finish their journey through the 12 constellations of the zodiac, which serve them; that is a year.

15 They shall serve as lights. In addition to the tasks mentioned in v. 14, they will be used to light the earth.

16 The two great lights, the greater light . . . and the lesser light. They were created equal, but the moon was diminished for contending, "Two kings cannot wear a single crown." **And the stars.** Having diminished the moon so much, the Holy One greatly increased her retinue to appease her.

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Once God said, "Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky," why must we be told again that "they shall serve as lights in the expanse of the sky" (v. 15)? It seems superfluous as well to remind us that they will "shine upon the earth." ✦ Why are the sun and the moon called "the two great lights" (v. 16) if we are to be told immediately that one of them is "the greater light" and one "the lesser light"? ✦ For that matter, how can the moon be called a "great light" when the astronomers tell us that it is smaller than the planets?

RASHBAM appearance of the stars to the next marks a single day. **And the years.** Four seasons mark a complete year.

15 They shall serve as lights. Of course, they also have the purpose of providing light for the world.

16 The lesser light. The lesser of the two great lights.

KIMHI solstices. Just as the year is marked by four seasons—summer and winter, spring and fall—so too the 24 hours of the day are divided into four periods. As for "days," these also indicate the days that make up a month: 29½ days and 44 minutes. "Years" refers to solar years comprising 365¼ days. Unlike English, in Hebrew it is the word for "year," *shana,* that is connected to "second" (*sheni*); it refers to the period after which the sun returns for a "second" time to the point where it began its circuit. (A lunar year lasts only 354¼ days.)

15 To shine upon the earth. These "lights" were no brighter now than when originally created, but now they were hung where they could give light to creatures with eyesight. The light of course could also be used by all other lower creations as appropriate to each.

16 God made the two great lights. Rather, He "prepared" them to shine on the earth by allotting a particular time period to each. **The greater light.** According to the astronomers, the sun is 170 times greater than the moon. **To dominate.** This refers both to the light and to the other effects these "lights" have on the earth. **The lesser light.** The moon itself is actually dark; all its light actually comes from the sun, which is why it waxes and wanes. **And the stars.** They too shine on the earth at night, along with the moon, when the sun is underneath the earth and thus cannot shine on it. The moon and stars do not shine during the day simply because the light of the sun cancels them out.

IBN EZRA signs for the set times." But this is nonsense; you would also have to ignore the "and" of "and for seasons" (OJPS). With regard to the hours and minutes, be aware that time is simply the measurement of the rotation of the sphere. There was no time before the creation of the sphere. So there is no sense in asking why the world was not created before almost 5,000 years ago. There was no "before" before the world was created.

16 The two great lights. "Great" in contrast to the stars, though one of the two was greater than the other. See similarly "the three great sons of Jesse had left and gone with Saul to the war" (1 Sam. 17:13), which afterward identifies Eliab as the "greatest" (that is, the oldest) of the three. As for the rabbinic statement, "Neither was greater than the other," there is a mystery involved. You might wonder: Have the astronomers not said that Jupiter and all the planets except for Mercury and Venus are bigger than the moon? How then can it be considered one of the "great" lights? But "great" does not refer to their physical size, but to their light. That is why they are referred to as "lights." The light of the moon is many, many times greater because it is so much closer to the earth. (It is proven, to be sure, that the moon really has no light of its own; "moonlight" is actually a reflection of the light of the sun, though it is perfectly fine to refer to it as if it were the light of the moon itself.) **To dominate the day.** The sun dominates the day but not the night, when the sun has no light; the light of the moon and stars is not seen by day.

17 God set them in the expanse. This is idiomatic, like "I have *set* My bow in the clouds" (9:13). As I explained in my comment to "the expanse of the sky" (v. 14), they *appear* to be in the expanse.

NAHMANIDES (OJPS) of "seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter" (8:22). **The days.** The lengths of day and night. **The years.** Which are completed as they move through their circuits back to their starting points and then continue on for a "second" time (*sheni*), from which "years" (*shanim*) is derived. The plural "years" (or better "cycles") in our verse therefore refers both to the 365-day year of the sun and also to the 30-day cycle of the moon.

15 They shall serve as lights in the expanse of the sky to shine upon the earth. The key thing added here is "to shine upon the earth." For it might have been possible to make them visible in the sky to serve as signs (and so forth) without having them actually shed light on the earth. So they are not merely to "be . . . in the expanse of the sky" but to look down toward the earth and shine on it.

17 God set them in the expanse of the sky. This tells us that they are not part of the expanse but are separate bodies set into it.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS the seventh-day Sabbath "is a *sign* between Me and you throughout the ages"—and the "seasons" are the months, made up of four weeks. As Ps. 104:19 tells us, "He made the moon to mark the seasons" (Abarbanel).

15 They shall serve as lights in the expanse of the sky to shine upon the earth. It is normal to hang a lamp somewhere high (Hizkuni).

16 And the stars. The Torah wanted the dry land to appear before the creation of the stars lest we relate its appearance to them (Gersonides). The astronomers define "day" as the period when the sun is above the horizon, but the Torah takes things differently: "day" refers to the period when there is sun*light*, even if the sun itself is below the horizon. So it would be impossible to judge when night began without the stars (Abarbanel).

NJPS expanse of the sky to shine upon the earth, [18]to dominate the day and the night, and to separate light from darkness. And God saw that this was good. [19]And there was evening and there was morning, a fourth day.

[20]God said, "Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and birds that

OJPS firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth, [18]and to rule over the day and over the night, and to divide the light from the darkness; and God saw that it was good. [19]And there was evening and there was morning, a fourth day.

[20]And God said: "Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures, and let

אֹתָם אֱלֹהִים בִּרְקִיעַ הַשָּׁמָיִם לְהָאִיר
עַל־הָאָרֶץ׃ [18] וְלִמְשֹׁל בַּיּוֹם וּבַלַּיְלָה
וְלַהַבְדִּיל בֵּין הָאוֹר וּבֵין הַחֹשֶׁךְ וַיַּרְא
אֱלֹהִים כִּי־טוֹב׃ [19] וַיְהִי־עֶרֶב וַיְהִי־בֹקֶר
יוֹם רְבִיעִי׃ פ
[20] וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יִשְׁרְצוּ הַמַּיִם שֶׁרֶץ נֶפֶשׁ
חַיָּה וְעוֹף יְעוֹפֵף עַל־הָאָרֶץ עַל־פְּנֵי רְקִיעַ

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Since vv. 14–15 tell us that the lights are created for six separate reasons—(1) to separate day from night; (2) as signs; (3) for the seasons, (4) the days, and (5) the years; (6) to shine upon the earth—why are only two of these mentioned after they are in fact created: "to shine upon the earth" (v. 17) and "to separate light from darkness" (v. 18)? ✦ Why is "to shine upon the earth" listed as the first of their purposes when they are created, though it is the last of the six reasons given for their creation? ✦ Why does God's original statement not say that they are also to "dominate the day and the night"? ✦ How is it that heavenly bodies can be subservient in their purpose to material things on the earth? ✦ How could water, which is just one of the four elements, "bring forth swarms of living creatures" (v. 20), which consist of all four? The same question applies to the earth and vegetation of v. 11, but the question is even more difficult here, since fire is incompatible with water and could not exist there to be combined with the other elements. ✦ Why would "the waters bring forth . . . birds that fly"? Scientifically it would make much more sense for birds to be created with the other land animals on Day Six. ✦ Why is this statement of God not followed by "And it was so"?

RASHI **20 Swarms.** Any creature that is not elevated off the ground is considered to "swarm" over it. Among winged creatures, this would include the likes of flies; among those on the ground, ants, beetles, and worms; among larger creatures, moles, mice, and lizards; and all the fish.

KIMHI **18 To dominate the day and the night.** The sun and the moon respectively. **To separate light from darkness.** Sunrise marks the beginning of the day, the appearance of the stars the beginning of darkness and night. For nighttime can also be called "dark" even though there is some light; it is dark by comparison with daylight.

20 Let the waters bring forth swarms. The Hebrew verb "swarm" (and it is a verb; see OJPS) means "to multiply," both reproductively and numerically. Once the land and the water were established in their separate places, He decreed that they produce the creatures appropriate to each. First the water, which was originally above the

NAHMANIDES **18 To dominate the day and the night.** This "domination" is separate from their serving as lights; it consists of their serving as signs and so forth (v. 14). They dominate the earth by means of the changes they effect on it, in the growth and decay of the various lower bodies. For the sun, in its dominion over the day, causes the warm and dry things to sprout and grow, while the moon, ruling the night, fructifies the springs and the seas, all the cool and wet things. So "to dominate the day and the night" applies generally to both of them. They dominate the lower things. It may further refer to their astrological powers in determining what will happen to the lower bodies. The sign that rises on a particular day or night is said to "rule" over it: "Behold the sun and the moon and the stars, the whole heavenly host, [which] the LORD your God allotted to other peoples everywhere under heaven" (Deut. 4:19); "He reckoned the number of the stars; to each He gave its name" (Ps. 147:4); and He "calls them each by name" (Isa. 40:26). "Naming them" is a metaphor for assigning the particular power that belongs to each one—justice to this one, war to that one, and so on for all the different astrological powers. All of it derives from the higher power of God's will. As the psalm continues, "Great is our LORD and full of power" (Ps. 147:5); so too Isa. 40:26 goes on to invoke "His great might and vast power." According to the mystical Way that I have hinted at, this dominion is complete in Truth. **And to separate light from darkness.** Despite what Ibn Ezra says, I think this phrase corresponds to "to separate day from night" (v. 14). These, after all, were their names (see v. 5). Throughout this chapter, we see commands being given and fulfilled; the same is true here. The sun is being given dominion over the day, which is light even when the sun is not visible, and the moon its separate, lesser dominion over the night, which is completely dark unless the moon illuminates its darkness. This is therefore a fulfillment of the command given in v. 14, matching that of v. 4.

20 Let the waters bring forth swarms. How can Rashi reconcile his comment with God's telling Noah and his sons, "Be fertile, then, and increase; swarm over the earth and increase on it" (9:7)? Even grammatically, according to his explanation it would seem that in v. 21 the creatures should "swarm" in the water rather than the water "swarming" (see OJPS) with them. Moreover, birds do not fall into this category, yet there are many birds no higher off the ground than Rashi's moles and mice. Onkelos translates very well, associating this word with constant, rapid movement. (Conceivably the Hebrew word *sheretz* comes from the phrase *she-ratz*, "which runs.") Similarly, "creep"

RASHBAM **18 To separate light from darkness.** To distinguish the beginning of the period of light, at sunrise, from the beginning of the period of darkness, at the appearance of the stars.

20 Birds that fly above the earth. Though they were brought forth from the waters, they would grow on the earth.

IBN EZRA **18 To dominate the day and the night.** The "day" of the Torah begins when the sun rises and ends when it sets; the "night" begins when the stars appear. (Our Sages, who say that it takes three stars to testify to the beginning of the night, are exactly right about this.) Know further that after the sun is down, when it grows dark, one may still see light in the clouds for as much as an hour and 20 minutes. In the same way, the morning grows light before the sun begins to shine. **And to separate light from darkness.** It is only when the light of the sun appears by day and the light of the moon by night that one can genuinely distinguish full day and full night. In v. 4 this was done only *in potentia*; now it has taken effect.

20 Let the waters bring forth swarms. Ordinarily the Hebrew verb is intransitive (as OJPS translates), but here it is in fact transitive (as NJPS translates). The same usage is found in "The Nile shall bring forth a swarm of frogs" (Exod. 7:28). The verb implies not only bringing them into existence—by preparing the physical bodies to receive the souls that animate them—but

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **18 To dominate the day and the night.** The moon is sometimes visible during the day, but does not "dominate" it (Hizkuni). **To separate light from darkness.** This phrase refers not to the sun and the moon, but to the stars, which appear when the light departs and the darkness enters (Hizkuni).

20 Let the waters bring forth swarms. Not the "seas" but the "waters," for even water in a utensil can produce maggots (Hizkuni). **Birds that fly above the earth across the expanse of the sky.** To cleanse the air for the inhabitants of earth from the dampness left over from the formation of the expanse on Day Two (Sforno).

NJPS fly above the earth across the expanse of the sky." [21]God created the great sea monsters, and all the living creatures of every kind that creep, which the waters brought forth in swarms, and all the winged birds of every kind. And God saw

OJPS fowl fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven." [21]And God created the great sea-monsters, and every living creature that creepeth, wherewith the waters swarmed, after its kind, and every winged fowl after its kind; and God

הַשָּׁמָיִם׃ 21 וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הַתַּנִּינִם*
הַגְּדֹלִים וְאֵת כָּל־נֶפֶשׁ הַחַיָּה ׀ הָרֹמֶשֶׂת
אֲשֶׁר שָׁרְצוּ הַמַּיִם לְמִינֵהֶם וְאֵת כָּל־
עוֹף כָּנָף לְמִינֵהוּ וַיַּרְא אֱלֹהִים כִּי־

v. 21 חסר י׳ בתראה

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why are we told that God "created" the great sea monsters and the other creatures (v. 21), using the verb from v. 1 that refers to creation *ex nihilo*, when it is clear that the waters brought them forth?

RASHI **21 The great sea monsters.** The largest fish in the sea. But midrash applies this term to the Leviathan and his mate. For God created them male and female, but He killed the female and salted her flesh for the righteous in the World to Come. If the two of them had "been fertile" and "increased," the world could not have remained in existence.

RASHBAM **21 The great sea monsters.** The Holy One commanded the waters to "bring forth swarms of living creatures" (v. 20). This sounds as if it would also include some fish that were no more than reasonably large. Now the text makes clear that "the great sea monsters" we know from other biblical texts were created along with them: "Leviathan the Elusive Serpent—Leviathan the Twisting Serpent" (Isa. 27:1); **[B]** "Can you draw out Leviathan by a fishhook?" (Job 40:25).

[B] This verse goes on to refer to Leviathan by the same Hebrew word translated here as "sea monster."

KIMHI dry land and was created before it. The earth will "bring forth" creatures (v. 24), but the water "swarms" with them, because there are so many more species and so many more members of each species in the sea than on land. Note that "swarm" refers to the movement of these creatures as well. The text does not bother to mention that they were created "after their kind" until v. 21. **Living creatures.** The Hebrew implies creatures that are capable of independent movement—animal life, unlike the plant life that the land brought forth on day three. **Birds that fly.** They too "swarm" over the earth, but their natural environment is primarily air and water. **Across the expanse of the sky.** The air.

21 God created the great sea monsters. "Let the waters bring forth" of v. 20 is not followed by "and it was so" because the water alone did not have the power to bring forth animal life without divine help, indicated here by the fact that God created these creatures in collaboration with the sea, some of them much greater than would be possible on land. (See the extraordinary description of Leviathan in Job 40:25–32; some think this is a species, some that it is a unique individual, and some that all such "great sea monsters" are called Leviathan.) **Which the waters brought forth in swarms.** You must know that in some places in the sea far away from land there are no fish. Nothing can live at sea because there is no food except where plants grow on rocks close to shore or are dropped from passing ships, and no boats can reach these far-off places. Some fishermen, however, have gotten close enough to such places to realize that there are no fish there and to see that the water there is extremely stormy.

IBN EZRA also bringing them "forth" (as we see from the birds). **Birds that fly above the earth across the expanse of the sky.** This confirms my explanation in v. 6 about the expanse. Birds fly in the air, not "over the surface of the firmament." For Saadia's comment to be correct, the birds would have to be flying "over" the *underside* of the firmament! (The unusual verb form is a Polel; see Isa. 62:7 for another example.)

21 God created the great sea monsters. Singled out for special mention because they are so great, that is, so enormous. **All the living creatures of every kind that creep.** "Creep" simply means "move," though some think this word and its homonym meaning "trample" are a single verb.

NAHMANIDES of v. 21 refers to creatures that move constantly, never being quiet or resting. In fact, every winged creature with four legs is considered "swarming," since it can use its legs like the other swarming creatures, while only flying things with two legs fall into the category of "winged birds," since flying is their primary means of movement. In 8:17, "let them swarm on the earth and be fertile and increase on earth," the point is that they should move everywhere on the earth (and 9:7 would be the same). So perhaps we should understand the phrase to mean that the waters swarm everywhere and bring forth living creatures. See Exod. 7:28, and Exod. 1:7 should be interpreted the same way. **Of living creatures.** Literally, "living souls." That is, the souls of the fish as well as their bodies come from the water, unlike human beings, whose souls and bodies were created separately: "The LORD God formed man from the dust of the earth. He blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul" (2:7). Notice that no "soul" whatsoever is mentioned on the third day, in connection with the plants. For the ability to grow by means of the appetitive soul **[R]** is reserved for creatures that move. But the Greeks, who say that growth among moving creatures depends on soul and so plants must grow by the same means, must still distinguish between an "animal" or appetitive soul and a vegetative soul without animation. Our Sages say in Genesis Rabbah that date palms have appetite, but perhaps this is an appetite for growth, not really a "soul." **And all the winged birds of every kind.** This was the day of creation from water, as the sixth day was the day of creation from earth. If so, then "the waters brought forth" these as well, and 2:19, "the LORD God formed out of the earth all the wild beasts and all the birds of the sky," needs a comma after "beasts"—He formed the beasts out of the earth, and He also formed the birds. There are many cases similar to this, where one has to punctuate the verse carefully to understand it correctly. This is certainly the opinion of the Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer, but in the Talmud there is a dispute about it; some say they were indeed formed from earth, but from the earth on the sea floor.

21 God created the great sea monsters. These are singled out for mention because of their great size, many leagues in length. The Greeks wrote in their books that they knew of some specimens as long as 500 leagues. Our Sages, too, speak in hyperbolic terms about them. Yet even these God "created"—that is, out of nothing. He will do the same for humankind because of our lofty place in creation; see v. 27, which says that we were created out of nothing by God's intelligence and intention. **And God saw that this was good.** I am surprised to see that there is no "And it was so" on this day. Perhaps saying "God created" after "Let the waters bring forth" (v. 20) made it awkward to include this. The Sages explained it by saying that "the great sea monsters" were Leviathan and his mate; the female of the pair, however, was killed and salted for the righteous to eat in the World to Come. So "And it was so" would be inappropriate, since that implies permanent existence.

[R] See Special Topics, "Medieval Jewish Philosophy."

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **21 God created the great sea monsters.** That is, He created in the sea the potential to bring forth these creatures, which it had not originally had (Sforno).

NJPS that this was good. 22God blessed them, saying, "Be fertile and increase, fill the waters in the seas, and let the birds increase on the earth." 23And there was evening and there was morning, a fifth day.

24God said, "Let the earth bring forth every kind of living creature: cattle, creeping things, and wild beasts of every kind." And it was so. 25God made wild

טֹוב׃ 22 וַיְבָרֶךְ אֹתָם אֱלֹהִים לֵאמֹר פְּרוּ
וּרְבוּ וּמִלְאוּ אֶת־הַמַּיִם בַּיַּמִּים וְהָעֹוף
יִרֶב בָּאָרֶץ׃ 23 וַיְהִי־עֶרֶב וַיְהִי־בֹקֶר יֹום
חֲמִישִׁי׃ פ
24 וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים תֹּוצֵא הָאָרֶץ נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה
לְמִינָהּ בְּהֵמָה וָרֶמֶשׂ וְחַיְתוֹ־אֶרֶץ לְמִינָהּ
וַיְהִי־כֵן׃ 25 וַיַּעַשׂ אֱלֹהִים ׀ אֶת־חַיַּת הָאָרֶץ

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why did God bless the sea creatures and the birds—but not the land animals—with the blessing "Be fertile and increase" (v. 22)? ✦ Why are we told that "God made" the land animals (v. 25) when in v. 24 the earth was instructed to bring them forth?

RASHI **22 God blessed them.** Since people cull them and hunt them and eat them, they were in need of blessing. (The beasts of v. 25 needed this blessing just as much, but God refrained from giving it to them because He knew He would have to curse the snake and did not want it to be included.) **Be fertile.** Literally, "fruitful" (OJPS), as if to say, "Produce fruit!" **And increase.** Literally, "multiply" (OJPS). If He had not said this, they would simply have produced one offspring each, no more. "Multiply" insured that each one could produce multiple offspring.

24 Let the earth bring forth every kind of living creature. As I explained in my comment to v. 14, everything was created on the first day; as you see, the earth needed only to "bring them forth." **Creeping things.** Things that "swarm" low to the ground, which must therefore "creep" over the earth, looking as if they are being dragged. For they can barely be seen "walking." "Creeping" and "swarming" are not walking, but commotion.

25 God made wild beasts of every kind. He made each of them full grown and capable of choice.

KIMHI **22 God blessed them, saying, "Be fertile and increase."** Indeed there are far more of them than of the land animals. **The waters in the seas.** In the rivers they are in fact not quite so plentiful. God was of course not literally speaking to the sea creatures, as they do not have the intelligence to receive a divine communication. Rather, the "speech" quoted here is an expression of God's will that they should be thus and so.

25 God made wild beasts . . . cattle . . . creeping things. Rather, He "prepared" them (for the earth had already brought them forth in v. 24). That is, He organized them

NAHMANIDES **22 God blessed them, saying, "Be fertile and increase."** The blessing was that each one of them should be fertile and produce many of the same kind: "I will bless her so that she shall give rise to nations" (17:16). "Blessing" of this kind can apply to plants as well: "I will ordain My blessing for you in the sixth year, so that it shall yield a crop sufficient for three years" (Lev. 25:21). But no such blessing was given on the third day of creation, for the following reason. The animals, like humankind, were created just two at a time, one male and one female, and therefore greatly needed a blessing of fertility. (The land animals that were made on the sixth day fell under this same blessing; all nonspeaking animals fall into a single category.) But the plants sprouted all over the earth in great numbers, just as they are today. The Sages, however, say the animals required a blessing of fertility because people hunt them and eat them. **Fill the waters in the seas.** And presumably in the other waters as well, though there are many more of them in the seas than in the streams. **And let the birds increase on the earth.** Though they were created from the water, their blessing of fertility was on the earth. There is no bird that lays its eggs and grows them in the water. Even birds that live on the water and get their food there lay their eggs and hatch them on land.

24 Cattle. The Hebrew word refers to herbivores, whether wild or domestic. **Wild beasts.** Carnivores, which are beasts of prey.

25 Creeping things. Despite Rashi's comment on this term in v. 24, see v. 28, where it is the "beasts" that "creep on earth," as well

OJPS saw that it was good. 22And God blessed them, saying: "Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let fowl multiply in the earth." 23And there was evening and there was morning, a fifth day.

24And God said: "Let the earth bring forth the living creature after its kind, cattle, and creeping thing, and beast of the earth after its kind." And it was so. 25And God made the beast of the earth

RASHBAM **22 God blessed them.** You will find that God blesses all the various kinds of living creatures: fish, birds, humans, cattle, and wild beasts. **Fill the waters.** Note the distinction between the intransitive Qal imperative *mil'u* and the transitive Piel imperative *mall'u*. **Let the birds increase on the earth.** Note that ל״ה verbs have an apocopated jussive form, losing the ה at the end, used also for the converted imperfect.

24 Wild beasts. The Hebrew phrase has a superfluous ו; see similarly "son of Beor" (Num. 24:3) and "fountain" (Ps. 114:8). **And it was so.** Forever. It has been that way ever since.

IBN EZRA **22 Be fertile and increase.** Despite the grammatical form, note that this is not a command; it describes what will happen. The same is true of "Die on the mountain that you are about to ascend" (Deut. 32:50). Obviously it was not in Moses' power to will himself to die.

24 Let the earth bring forth. Assuming that the animals (and the humans as well) are made of all four elements—earth, air, fire, and water—why is earth alone mentioned here, as also in 2:7 and 3:19? The answer is that the basic structure of each of them is the skeleton (see Ezekiel 37), which is indeed made of earth. **Every kind of living creature.** A general term, referring to everything brought forth by the fire, the water, and the earth, including human beings. The Hebrew uses the word *nefesh*, the animal soul that all of them have; but only humanity will be given the higher soul, the *neshamah*. **Cattle.** Domesticated animals, which live alongside people and serve their needs, to ride and to eat. **Creeping things.** The tiny animals that move along the ground. **Wild beasts.** Larger animals that do not live in settled areas. (The ו in this phrase is extraneous.)

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **22 God blessed them, saying.** Obviously God was not "saying" this to them; they were not creatures with intelligence, with whom one could speak. He was commanding that they have the potential to reproduce via the eggs they would make (Abarbanel). **Be fertile and increase.** See also only v. 28 and 9:1 and 7 (Masorah).

23 And there was evening and there was morning, a fifth day. On the fifth day it does not say, "And it was so," since the fish that were created on that day were not visible (Hizkuni). The evening is connected with the sea creatures, the lower of the two categories that were created on that day, and the morning with the birds, the higher of the two (Abarbanel).

24 Let the earth bring forth every kind of living creature. By contrast with "Let the earth sprout vegetation" (v. 11), with the animals the earth must literally bring them "forth" so that they are no longer connected to it as plants must be (Abarbanel).

NJPS beasts of every kind and cattle of every kind, and all kinds of creeping things of the earth. And God saw that this was good. 26And God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. They shall rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the cattle, the whole

OJPS after its kind, and the cattle after their kind, and every thing that creepeth upon the ground after its kind; and God saw that it was good. 26And God said: "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every

לְמִינָהּ וְאֶת־הַבְּהֵמָה לְמִינָהּ וְאֵת כָּל־
רֶמֶשׂ הָאֲדָמָה לְמִינֵהוּ וַיַּרְא אֱלֹהִים כִּי־
טוֹב׃ 26 וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים נַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם
בְּצַלְמֵנוּ כִּדְמוּתֵנוּ וְיִרְדּוּ בִדְגַת הַיָּם וּבְעוֹף

RASHI **26 Let us make man.** Our Sages learned from this the humility of the Holy One. Since man would be like the angels in appearance and they would be jealous of him, He consulted with them first. Similarly, when He judges kings He first consults with His retinue, as we know from what Micaiah told Ahab: "I saw the LORD seated upon His throne, with all the host of heaven standing in attendance to the right and to the left of Him" (1 Kings 22:19). Now, does God have a "right" or "left" side? The "right-hand" ones were judging in Ahab's favor, and the "left-hand" ones were judging against him. We see something similar in "This sentence is decreed by the Watchers; this verdict is commanded by the Holy Ones" (Dan. 4:14). Here too the Holy One consulted with His retinue and got permission. He said to them, "There are some among the higher beings in My likeness. If there are none in My likeness among the lower beings, there will be jealousy in My

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why does God consult with His creation, saying, "Let us make man" (v. 26), something He does not do with any other of the creatures? Why not simply say, "Let the earth bring forth man"? ✦ Why does He say "let us make"? After all, He was alone, "no alien god at His side" (Deut. 32:12), and in the actual event "He [not "they"] created them" (v. 27). ✦ How could God determine to create man "in our image, after our likeness" as if God indeed had a "likeness"? Remember that "you saw no shape when the LORD spoke to you at Horeb out of the fire" (Deut. 4:15). ✦ Why the distinction between "in our image, after our likeness"?

RASHBAM **26 And God said.** To His angels, as we also find in the stories of Micaiah son of Imlah, Isaiah, and Job. **[C] Let us make man in our image.** In the image of the angels. **After our likeness.** Like us with regard to wisdom. Note that when he misbehaves, man is "like" the beasts (Ps. 49:13,21) rather than the angels. **They shall rule.** Another apocopated ל״ה verb.

[C] See, respectively, 1 Kings 22, Isaiah 6, and Job 1–2.

IBN EZRA **26 Let us make man.** Some say the verb is not a Qal cohortative but a Niphal participle: "man is going to be made." **[L]** (For another example, see Neh. 5:18.) **In our image, after our likeness.** Some think these words are parenthetical, in the voice of Moses; see the next comment. Most certainly God has no "image."

[L] See Special Topics, "Biblical Hebrew."

KIMHI into these three categories, each with its own special place in nature. He wanted to make sure that the dangerous ones could not cause too much damage. That is also why He did not bless them. He could certainly not tell creatures that would be hazardous to others that He wanted them to fill the earth (though the Sages say He wanted to avoid blessing the serpent). As for the three categories, "cattle" are those that live with man and serve him: herds and flocks, horses, donkeys, and camels; "wild beasts" include carnivorous animals like lions, bears, leopards, and wolves, which were given their own habitat away from settled areas; and "creeping things." These latter were also placed away from settled areas—"the great and terrible wilderness with its seraph serpents and scorpions, a parched land with no water" (Deut. 8:15)—but a few harmless ones are found in settled areas as well. Look how wisely God arranged everything! Though the maggots that arise from rotting things also "creep," they are not mentioned, either generally or specifically, in the description of creation. **And God saw that this was good.** Even though some of them are hazardous, they still provide great benefit in many ways, as experimental scientists have determined; there are even medicines derived from serpents. Note too that each creature has precisely the anatomical structure necessary for it. Carnivorous animals like the lion have teeth and talons and physical power; the herbivorous ones who are their prey, like deer, have speed and agility. Each gets its proper nourishment and each has its time to die, "for the time of mischance comes to all" (Eccles. 9:11). But as we see from v. 30, at first even the carnivores ate grass. If the first lion had eaten the first sheep, or if the leopard in Noah's ark had eaten the goat, there would be no herbivores around, yet we see that there are.

26 Let us make man. Contrast the other creatures here below, which were to be produced by the water or the earth. Moreover, out of respect for man's status he was created last, to make known that all other creatures were created for his sake; he was made lord over all of them. My father (of blessed memory) explained "let *us* make" as being addressed to the four elements, which He asked to cooperate

NAHMANIDES as 7:21, "all flesh that crept on earth perished," as well as Ps. 104:20. In fact, רמשׂ with a שׂ is similar to רמס with a ס, as in "to be *trampled* underfoot" (Isa. 26:6) and the like. **Of the earth.** The larger animals creep "over" the earth, but these smaller ones creep on "the ground" (OJPS), since they move by dragging their entire bodies over the ground.

26 And God said. A special utterance is devoted to the making of man because of his status. His nature is not like that of the animals God created by the utterance of v. 24. **Let us make man.** The correct, straightforward explanation of this phrase is, as has already been clearly demonstrated to you, that God created the original matter out of nothing. Everything else was formed or made from this. Here, then, He is saying, "Let us—I and the earth—make man." The earth was to provide his body, as it had done with the animals, after which the Holy One would form it and put in the spirit (see 2:7). **In our image, after our likeness.** In his physical composition he would be like the earth from which his body was taken; but with regard to his spirit he would be like the higher beings, for the spirit is not a body and does not die. This is the straightforward sense of the verse, as I found it explained by Joseph Kimhi. **[S]** This is the most sensible explanation anyone has come up with. "Image" refers to appearance, as in "Nebuchadnezzar was so filled with rage at Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego that his *visage* was distorted" (Dan. 3:19); "likeness" refers to resemblance both in form and in action. Man resembles both the lower beings and the upper ones. The expression "You have made him little less than divine, and adorned him with glory and majesty" (Ps. 8:6) refers to his basic approach, which is one of wisdom, knowledge, and practical ability. And his physical body literally

[S] See David Kimhi's comment. Joseph was David's father.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **26 Let us make man.** That is, let us make man fit for mastery and rulership. This expression says nothing about the actual *creation* of man, where the verbs are all in the singular (Bekhor Shor). After having created the animals, God said to both the upper and the lower beings that He would make from them a man who had intelligence (Gersonides). The rational soul and physical body parallel "heaven and earth," making the sixth day of creation match the first. As to why man is not given a special day of

NJPS earth, and all the creeping things that creep on earth." 27And God created man in His image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created

OJPS creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth." 27And God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him; male and female created He

הַשָּׁמַיִם וּבַבְּהֵמָה וּבְכָל־הָאָרֶץ וּבְכָל־
הָרֶמֶשׂ הָרֹמֵשׂ עַל־הָאָרֶץ׃ 27 וַיִּבְרָא
אֱלֹהִים | אֶת־הָאָדָם בְּצַלְמוֹ בְּצֶלֶם
אֱלֹהִים בָּרָא אֹתוֹ זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה בָּרָא אֹתָם׃

RASHI creation." Though they did not assist Him in their creation, and though it would give the Christians an opening to quibble, the text did not refrain from saying "let *us* make man," to teach the way of politeness and humility: The great should always consult with the small and get their permission. Had the text said, "Let *Me* make man," we would not have realized that He was consulting with His court, but would have thought He was talking to Himself. Fortunately, v. 27 immediately gives the response to the Christians' claim: "*He* created," not "*they* created." **In our image.** In our mold. **[E] After our likeness.** With understanding and intelligence. **They shall rule the fish of the sea.** The Hebrew verb used here is a play on words, combining "rule" with "descend." If they deserve it, they will rule over all the other creatures; if they don't, they will sink lower than the animals and the animals will rule over them.

27 And God created man in His image. Rather, "in his image," in the mold that had been made for him. Everything else was created by an utterance, but man was handmade: "You lay Your hand upon me" (Ps. 139:5). He was "coined," stamped just as a blank is stamped into a coin: "It changes like

[E] See Rashi's first comment to v. 27.

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why are we told that God "created" man (v. 27), as if ex nihilo, rather than "made" him (which is what actually happened)? And why are we told here that man was created "in His image" but not "after His likeness"? Both these questions take on greater significance when we learn in 5:1 that "When God created man, He made him in the likeness of God." ✦ Why are we told "male and female He created them" rather than that He created them "after their kind," as with the other creatures, who were certainly also created "male and female"? ✦ How can the text say that He created them "male and female" when ch. 2 makes clear that the male was created alone and the female was fashioned from him only afterward? ✦ Finally, how are we to resolve the contradiction between "He created him" and "He created them"? ✦ Why was man created last? It cannot be a marker of status, since higher creations have already been created on Days One, Two, and Four. ✦ Why were human beings lumped in with the animals rather than being given a day of their own?

RASHBAM **27 In His image.** Rather, "in his"—man's—"image." **In the image of God.** Rather, "in the image of divine beings," the angels. Do not be surprised that our chapter says nothing about the creation of the angels. Moses wrote nothing here about angels, about Gehenna, or about the Chariot, **[D]** but only (as mentioned in my

[D] The strange conveyance of Ezekiel 1.

IBN EZRA **27 God created man.** Literally, "*the* man." You can understand some of the mystery behind this expression from the "garments of skins" in 3:21; **[M]** for now, suffice it to say that "man" is both a descriptive noun and a proper name. **In His image.** Those who take "in our image" of v. 26 as being in the voice of Moses understand this phrase to mean "God created man in his," man's, "image." This entails repunctuating 9:6 as "in an image, God made man," which is obviously brainless. Vv. 26–27 would have to be completely different for them to carry these meanings. And how could man have an image to be created in before he was actually created? And why would it make sense that "whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed" (9:6) because man was created "in an image"? Every living creature has an "image" too. Saadia thinks man's "likeness" to God refers to his exercise of dominion; "in His image" would mean "in the image that He,

[M] See further the end of Ibn Ezra's comments to ch. 3.

KIMHI with Him. The body would be made of them, and He would provide the spirit. On the other hand, the man was called *adam* ("human") because he was made of *adamah* ("humus, earth"). He is therefore distinguished from both the upper and the lower beings, though barely one in a thousand has access to his higher side. As Solomon said, "I found only one human being in a thousand" (Eccles. 7:28). **In our image, after our likeness.** Following my father's interpretation, "our" has the same referent as "us": **[C]** God and the elements working together, producing both a physical likeness and a spiritual one. An image can be either physical (e.g., Num. 33:52) or spiritual (e.g., "the image of God" in v. 27); the same is true of a likeness (contrast Song 7:8 and Ezek. 1:13). But it may be better to translate "*with* [by means of] our image." Following this understanding, these phrases would mean "let us use our intelligence to make man, even though he is created of earth, so that he can resemble us by also using intelligence." If it were not for man, there would not be any creature in the lower world to recognize who created it.

27 And God created man in His image. This creation refers to the soul; the forming of the body will be described in 2:7. The verbs are chosen carefully: a soul cannot be "formed," for this applies only to a physical object. **In the image of God.** That is, as an angel, one

[C] Our texts of Kimhi's comment say it does *not* have the same referent, but this seems to be an error.

NAHMANIDES resembles earth, while his soul resembles the higher beings. R. Eliezer's comment that the phrase "Let the earth bring forth a living soul" (as v. 24 could be literally translated) refers to the soul of Adam cannot possibly mean what it sounds as if it means. He is certainly referring to what I have said about it. For the appetitive soul, the *nefesh* that is "in the blood" (Lev. 17:11), was created from the earth for all the creatures that move on their own, after which bodies were created for them—first those of the animals, then that of man. Into the body of man He first put this animal soul, and then "He blew into his nostrils the breath [the *neshamah*] of life" (2:7). It is the latter that "returns to God who bestowed it" (Eccles. 12:7). But the enlightened person will understand the switch from singular to plural here, according to the Way of Truth, just as in v. 27. Perhaps, however, R. Eliezer was taking *eretz* in v. 24 not as "the earth" but as "the world," short for "the World of [Eternal] Life." **They shall rule.** The switch to plural here is on account of their being created "male and female" (v. 27). **The cattle.** Including the "wild beasts." **On earth.** They are to rule "over the earth" (as the Hebrew literally says) itself, uprooting, demolishing, digging and mining copper and iron. The verb refers to dominion of the kind that a master has over his slave.

27 God created man in His image. The text states in plain Hebrew the marvelous thing done with man, unlike all the other creatures. **Male and female He created them.** The original creation was from male and female, and His spirit was included in both of

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS creation on his own, the created beings are classified by their means of reproduction; humans are mammals and included with them on Day Six (Abarbanel). **In our image.** This expression is unique (Masorah). **After our likeness.** There is no actual "likeness" involved here; the "semblance" of Ezek. 1:26 (the same word in Hebrew) refers to something he dreamed, not to something he actually saw (Bekhor Shor). *After* our likeness, but not really *in* it (Sforno).

27 Male and female He created them. But not "after their kind," as He did with the animals (see OJPS to v. 25). Their purpose was

NJPS them. 28God blessed them and God said to them, "Be fertile and increase, fill the earth and master it; and rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and all the living things that creep on earth."

OJPS them. 28And God blessed them; and God said unto them: "Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that creepeth upon the earth."

28 וַיְבָרֶךְ אֹתָם֙ אֱלֹהִ֔ים וַיֹּ֥אמֶר לָהֶ֖ם
אֱלֹהִ֑ים פְּר֣וּ וּרְב֗וּ וּמִלְא֤וּ אֶת־הָאָ֙רֶץ֙
וְכִבְשֻׁ֔הָ וּרְד֗וּ בִּדְגַ֤ת הַיָּם֙ וּבְעֹ֣וף הַשָּׁמַ֔יִם
וּבְכָל־חַיָּ֖ה הָרֹמֶ֥שֶׂת עַל־הָאָֽרֶץ׃

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why did God say "Be fertile and increase" (v. 28) with man but not with the animals? ✦ Why are the humans blessed by being told that they should "rule the fish of the sea" and so forth instead of being instructed about providence or told about the proper way to behave? But no: they are told to "rule the fish," as if the best they could do would be to "consort with dullards" (Prov. 13:20).

RASHI clay under the seal" (Job 38:14). **In the image of God He created him.** This phrase explains that the image prepared for man was an image in the likeness of his Creator. **Male and female He created them.** Later we read, "And the LORD God fashioned the rib that He had taken from the man into a woman" (2:22). But the Hebrew word implies not a mere rib, but one entire side of him. As the midrash explains, the Holy One originally created man double, with two faces, and then split him in two. But the straightforward sense of our phrase is simply to inform you that both of them were created on the sixth day, not to explain how it was done. That is explained elsewhere.

28 Master it. The Hebrew verb is missing a ו, implying that one can also read it as directed to the male: "Master *her*." The male dominates the female, to the extent that he

RASHBAM comments to vv. 1, 5, and 8) about the "six days" (Exod. 20:11) during which the things that we see here on earth were created. **Male and female He created them.** As explained in 2:21–22. The general statement is given here; later the details are provided. This is precisely the example used by R. Eliezer b. R. Yose the Galilean to illustrate this interpretive method in his *Baraita of 32 Rules*.

28 Master it. Notice that nothing but the lack of a *dagesh* in the ב distinguishes this Qal imperative form from the Piel perfect. **[E]**

[E] See Special Topics, "Biblical Hebrew."

KIMHI of the Separate Intelligences. **[D]** The Holy One, of course, is incomparably higher than any of the Separate Intelligences. He causes and they are caused; He creates and they are created. That is why "His image" is followed here by "in the image of God," to distinguish the divine from the merely angelic. **Male and female He created them.** For the details, see ch. 2.

28 Master it. Note the missing ו of the Hebrew word, making it look singular rather than plural. A midrash suggests that this points to mastery as appropriate for men but not for women. This would imply that the commands to "be fertile and increase" (which do have the ו) would apply to both men and women, but although there is a dispute about this the *halakhah* rules that it applies only to men. Another midrash suggests that man is supposed to be master over woman, at least to the extent of keeping her from going out

[D] See Special Topics, "Medieval Jewish Philosophy."

IBN EZRA in His wisdom, saw would be good." **In the image of God.** The image chosen by God—a special mark of respect. "Let us make," in this reading, would simply be a use of the royal "we," as in 29:27, Num. 22:6, and Dan. 2:36. But all these examples are misleading. In each of these cases, the נ in the verb is not a royal "we," but has a different grammatical explanation. Moses Gikatilla, the Spanish grammarian, made an error about this in his book. **[N]**

Now I am going to explain it to you. Know that all of creation was created by command of the Holy One for the sake of man. The plants and the living creatures were brought forth by the earth and the water, but the Holy One said to the angels, "Let us make man—we will take care of it ourselves, not the water or the earth." Now, the Torah is written in human language, for both Moses who spoke it and those who heard it were human beings. And Moses did not write it just for philosophers and for his own generation, but for ordinary people in every generation. But people cannot say anything about what is higher or lower than them without using human imagery. Either the ground opens its "mouth" (Num. 16:30), or inanimate objects have a "hand" (Num. 13:29) or a "head" (Prov. 8:26). Heaven forbid that we imagine God to have a "likeness" of any kind! As the prophet says, "To whom, then, can you *liken* Me?" (Isa. 40:25). But because the higher soul does not die and is not a body but nonetheless fills the human body, it is compared to the Holy One. For the body is like a world in miniature. Blessed by the Holy One, who "began with the biggest and ended with the littlest" (44:12). **[O]** Another prophet said that he had seen God's glory in human form: "Above the expanse over their heads was the semblance of a throne, in appearance like sapphire; and on top, upon this semblance of a throne, there was the semblance of a human form" (Ezek. 1:26). But God is One, and He is the Creator of all, and He is All. I cannot go into more detail about this. **He created him . . . He created them.** Man was originally created with two faces and thus was one while simultaneously being two. "In the image of God" means "in the image of an angel"; but man was created male and female. **[P]**

28 Be fertile and increase. See my comment to v. 22. In this case, however, tradition says there is a commandment to "be fertile and increase," which it connects to this verse as a reminder.

[N] We omit the technical details of Ibn Ezra's extensive discussion. **[O]** He began with the entire world and ended with a microcosm of it, humankind. **[P]** Ibn Ezra seems to be hinting that the simultaneously single and double creation refers not merely to male and female but also to body and soul.

NAHMANIDES them. That is why they are "created" in this chapter but the man is "formed" and the woman "fashioned" in ch. 2. A word to the wise is sufficient.

28 God blessed them and God said to them. This is an actual blessing, which is why the text adds "God said to them." Contrast v. 22, where "blessing" simply meant granting them the power to reproduce. **Fill the earth.** This is a blessing that there should be so many multitudes of them that the earth should be filled with them. But in my opinion it includes a blessing that they should separate into the various peoples, clan by clan, and fill the entire world to the ends of the earth. They should not remain in a single place, as the generation of the Tower of Babel planned to do. **Master it.** He gave them power and dominion over the earth to do as they wished with the animals

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS to achieve complete fulfillment of their human potential "in the image of God," not merely to perpetuate the species—which is why, in v. 28, they had to be specifically commanded to do that as well (Abarbanel).

28 Be fertile and increase. Some say this blessing was given them only after they had sinned and brought death on themselves, when it would be necessary to "fill the earth"; had the blessing been given at this point in the story, it would have said "fill the garden"

NJPS [29]God said, "See, I give you every seed-bearing plant that is upon all the earth, and every tree that has seed-bearing fruit; they shall be yours for food. [30]And to all the animals on land, to all the birds of the sky, and to everything that creeps on

OJPS [29]And God said: "Behold, I have given you every herb yielding seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed—to you it shall be for food; [30]and to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to every thing that creepeth

29 וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים הִנֵּה נָתַתִּי לָכֶם אֶת־
כָּל־עֵשֶׂב ׀ זֹרֵעַ זֶרַע אֲשֶׁר עַל־פְּנֵי כָל־
הָאָרֶץ וְאֶת־כָּל־הָעֵץ אֲשֶׁר־בּוֹ פְרִי־עֵץ
זֹרֵעַ זָרַע לָכֶם יִהְיֶה לְאָכְלָה׃ 30 וּלְכָל־חַיַּת
הָאָרֶץ וּלְכָל־עוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וּלְכֹל ׀ רוֹמֵשׂ

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why do vv. 29–30 seem to distinguish between what humans eat and what the animals eat, when we see that both groups eat the same things? Has nature changed? ✦ Why does the story of man's creation not end with the words "And God saw that this was good" as the other creations do?

RASHI prevents her from spending too much time out and about. Moreover, it teaches you that the commandment to "be fertile and increase" applies only to the male, to whom mastery comes more naturally, not to the female.

29 They shall be yours for food. This is the same as is given to the animals in v. 30. The man and his wife were not permitted to kill an animal and eat meat; all of them alike were only to eat vegetation. Only in the time of the sons of Noah were they permitted to eat meat: "Every creature that lives shall be yours to eat; as with the green grasses [which I already permitted to Adam], I give you all these" (9:3).

KIMHI shopping. But the straightforward sense of the verse is that human beings should have mastery over the other creatures. **Rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and all the living things that creep on earth.** Their rulership (the plural matching "male and female" of v. 27) would be based on two things: their superior intelligence and their toolmaking ability. And of course after the Flood they would need to rule over the other animals in order to be able to eat their flesh (which was prohibited up until that time). Fish and birds, swimming in the sea and flying in the air, could not be "ruled over" without the use of all man's intelligence. That is why they are mentioned first.

29 I give you. OJPS translates more literally, but NJPS correctly understands that this idiom expresses the present tense. For another example, see the Hebrew of 23:13. Alternatively, the plants were "given" to humankind already when they were created in the sense that they were created for humans' benefit. **They shall be yours for food.** "They," the plants mentioned here. People were not permitted to eat meat until after the Flood, though I do not know why. Perhaps it was reserved until then as a reward for Noah for saving the animals from the Flood. The Holy One does not withhold reward from any creature, least of all man. See Ezekiel 29, where even King Nebuchadrezzar of Babylon is rewarded for his labor in destroying Tyre by being given the wealth of Egypt.

30 Everything . . . in which there is the breath of life. Literally, "every thing . . . wherein there is a living soul" (OJPS). For anything with a soul is superior to a plant, which has a vegetative soul but not a living one. And lower things are created for the sake of things

RASHBAM **29 See, I give you.** The Hebrew literally says "Behold, I *have given* you" (OJPS), but NJPS translates correctly; "behold" plus the past tense indicates that the action is so immediate that it is no sooner said than done. See similarly (but without "behold") 14:22 and 23:13. **They shall be yours for food.** But they were not permitted to eat meat until the time of Noah, when God told him: "Every creature that lives shall be yours to eat; as with the green grasses, I give you all these" (9:3).

IBN EZRA **29 See, I give you every seed-bearing plant.** Every living thing was given permission to eat plants for food. **Every tree that has seed-bearing fruit; they shall be yours for food.** The fruit of the trees was specifically permitted only to man. But at that point eating meat was not permitted at all—not until after the Flood.

NAHMANIDES and all the other creatures, to build up and to tear down, to carve precious metals out of the mountains, and everything else that follows from this. They should "rule . . . the whole earth" (v. 26). **And rule the fish of the sea.** Which are hidden from them in the water. **The birds of the sky.** Which are not with them on the ground. **And all the living things that creep on earth.** All the wild creatures on earth. Note that these three are listed in the order of their creation. The psalms too record this mastery: "You have made him master over Your handiwork, laying the world at his feet, sheep and oxen, all of them, and wild beasts, too; the birds of the heavens, the fish of the sea" (Ps. 8:7–9). But our Sages distinguish between "mastery" and "rule." **[T]**

29 See, I give you every seed-bearing plant. See Rashi's comment, both here and in his commentary to B. Sanh. 59b. But notice that the plants and trees of our verse, given to the man and his wife to eat, are distinguished from the "green plants" of v. 30, given to the animals and birds. Even they do not all eat exactly the same food. But the animals too were forbidden to eat meat until the era of the sons of Noah. This is the understanding of our Sages, and this is the straightforward sense of the text. This is because animals who have the power of motion have a certain something in them resembling the higher creatures that possess a rational soul. They can choose what is good for them, decide what to eat, and flee from danger and death. As Kohelet says, "Who knows if a man's lifebreath does rise upward and if a beast's breath does sink down into the earth?" (Eccles. 3:21). Once "all flesh had corrupted its ways on earth" (6:12) and it was decreed that they die in the Flood, but (on account of Noah) He rescued enough of them to preserve the species, He gave humanity permission to slaughter and eat meat. After all, it was only on account of Noah that the animals survived the Flood in the first place. But people were still forbidden to consume the soul **[U]** or to eat a limb torn from a living animal. He further prohibited us Jews from eating blood at all, since the blood is where the soul is located: "For the life of all flesh—its blood is its life. Therefore I say to the Israelite people: You shall not partake of the blood of any flesh, for the life of all flesh is its blood" (Lev. 17:14). That is, the body of any nonspeaking creature is permissible to eat, but only after it dies—the "soul" may not be eaten. This is the reason for the rules about kosher slaughter. As for the rabbinic statement that cruelty to animals is forbidden by the Torah, that is precisely why we recite the blessing, "Who has sanctified us by His commandments and commanded us regarding kosher slaughter." I will speak further about this matter of blood in my comments to Lev. 17:14, if God is good to me. **And every tree that has seed-bearing fruit.** The point is that they were to eat the *seeds* of the plants—wheat, barley, legumes, and the like—and the fruit from the trees, but not the trees or the grasses themselves. Eating them was made into a curse: "Your food shall be the grasses of the field" (3:18).

[T] See Rashi's comment. **[U]** See 9:4.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS (Hizkuni). Since human beings would have free will, they might agree to stop reproducing and destroy the species; that is the possibility the Torah has in mind here (Gersonides).

29 Upon all the earth. The phrase occurs just 11 times in the Bible (Masorah).

NJPS earth, in which there is the breath of life, [I give] all the green plants for food." And it was so. 31And God saw all that He had made, and found it very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

2 The heaven and the earth were finished, and all their array.

OJPS upon the earth, wherein there is a living soul, [I have given] every green herb for food." And it was so. 31And God saw every thing that He had made, and, behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

2 And the heaven and the earth were finished, and all the host

עַל־הָאָ֔רֶץ אֲשֶׁר־בּ֥וֹ נֶ֖פֶשׁ חַיָּ֑ה אֶת־כָּל־יֶ֥רֶק עֵ֛שֶׂב לְאָכְלָ֖ה וַיְהִי־כֵֽן׃ 31 וַיַּ֣רְא אֱלֹהִ֗ים אֶת־כָּל־אֲשֶׁ֤ר עָשָׂה֙ וְהִנֵּה־טֹ֣וב מְאֹ֔ד וַיְהִי־ עֶ֥רֶב וַיְהִי־בֹ֖קֶר יֹ֥ום הַשִּׁשִּֽׁי׃ פ

ב וַיְכֻלּ֥וּ הַשָּׁמַ֖יִם וְהָאָ֑רֶץ וְכָל־צְבָאָֽם׃

RASHI **31 The sixth day.** Here, at the end of creation, it is "the" sixth day rather than "a" sixth day. In Hebrew, the difference is the letter ה, which also symbolizes "5." God stipulated that Israel must accept the five books of the Torah. Another reading: All of creation was provisional until "*the* sixth day"—of Sivan, the day on which the Torah would be given at Mount Sinai.

KIMHI greater than they. **The green plants.** Plants cannot generally be eaten except when they are green and moist. **And it was so.** Each creature has an appetite for the food appropriate to it.

31 God saw all that He had made, and found it very good. "All that He had made" up to and including humankind, for creation would not have been complete without them; that is why it was "very" good. Maimonides, in *Guide* 3:10, cites the statement of R. Meir reading *tov m'od* ("very good") as *tov mot* ("death is good"); it is necessary in order to perpetuate the cycle of life. I have read that a scroll hidden away in Rome actually has this reading. Another explanation, found in Genesis Rabbah, is that the phrase combines the good inclination (*tov*) and the evil inclination (*mot*, "death"). For without the evil inclination no one would have children or build anything. **The sixth day.** "The" sixth day on which the world and all its creatures were at last complete.

2:1 The heaven and the earth were finished, and all their array. The array of heaven and the array of earth—their "generations" (v. 4, OJPS)—were all finished on the sixth day. From then on, there would be nothing new except for things done by way of a miracle. Nonetheless, during the six days of creation, the Holy One placed in each created thing the ability either to abandon its nature or to change it. R. Jonathan says in Genesis Rabbah that the Holy One pre-arranged with the sea that it would split during the exodus to allow the Israelites to pass through; R. Jeremiah bar Eleazar says He made similar arrangements with every created thing: "It was I who made the earth and created man upon it; My own hands stretched out the heavens, and *I commanded all their array*"

NAHMANIDES **31 And God saw all that He had made, and found it very good.** That is, as I explained in my first comment to v. 4, He decreed their continued existence. Onkelos explains it this way as well. The Hebrew word translated "very" refers to abundance. The reason it is added on this day is because this verse is speaking in general, about all of creation. Even if some slight evil could be found in it, it is "very" good, that is, most of it is good. Our Sages also add the explanations that *tov m'od* ("very good") can be read as *tov mot* ("death is good"), combining the good inclination (*tov*) and the evil inclination, **[V]** and that it is "good" to get one's punishment in this world and not in the World to Come. And this perspective is what prompted Onkelos's translation. Evil is necessary if good is to persist: "A season is set for everything, a time for every experience under heaven" (Eccles. 3:1). And some say that "very good" was used here in honor of the creation of man.

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why are we told that "God saw all that He had made, and found it very good" (v. 31), especially since we have already been told at each separate stage that "it was good"? ✦ Why do the words "He blessed them and called them Man" (5:2) appear only then and not here in the original story, where we would expect them?

✦ Why are we told that "the heaven and the earth were finished" (v. 1), as if they were made of their own accord, rather than stating who finished them?

RASHBAM **31 And God saw all that He had made, and found it very good.** He looked at all He had made and at all the actions He had performed to see whether any of them needed repair. It turned out that everything was fine and in good repair. **[F]** **And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.** The sixth day was concluded. **[G]** But Sabbath rest had begun in the evening, when the work of creation ceased. That is why this is "*the* sixth day"—the same "sixth day" of "six days you shall labor and do all your work" (Exod. 20:9). Note that none of the first five days is called "the" fifth (or whatever) day.

[F] See Rashbam's comment to Exod. 2:2. **[G]** The one manuscript of Rashbam's commentary known to his 19th-c. editor stops at this point—precisely the point when it seems Rashbam is about to say that the first Sabbath began in the morning—and does not pick up again until Genesis 18. We include here some comments of Rashbam found elsewhere in his commentary as well as comments newly identified (as of this writing) by Hillel Novetsky; see "Resources for Further Study." A few others that may be by Rashbam will be found in the "Additional Comments."

IBN EZRA **31 The sixth day.** The Hebrew looks as if it could grammatically mean "the day of the sixth"; some take it to mean that this was the day belonging to the sixth of the heavenly spheres. ("The seventh day" of 2:3 has the same grammatical form.) But this is not correct. As the astronomers explain, the sixth sphere is not connected with the sixth day. **[Q]** A more literal translation would be "a day that is the sixth" counting from the first day. The same Hebrew syntax is found in "a man who was Israelite" of Lev. 24:10 and (more significantly for us) here in v. 20, which says not "the expanse of the sky" but "the expanse that is the sky."

2:1 The heaven and the earth were finished. The verb is a Pual; **[R]** compare "the mountains *were covered*" (7:20). "The

[Q] The sixth sphere was that of Jupiter, but its day was Thursday; Friday was understood to belong to Venus. **[R]** See Special Topics, "Biblical Hebrew."

2:1 And all their array. The "array" of the earth is the animals, fish, and so forth described in ch. 1, including the plants and the human beings. The "array" of the heavens is "the two great lights . . . and the stars" (1:16). Compare "the sun and the moon and the stars, the whole heavenly *host*" (Deut. 4:19); note that OJPS uses "host" in our verse as well. But the Separate Intelligences are also part of the "array" of heaven, **[W]** as we see in "I saw the LORD seated upon His throne, with all the *host* of heaven standing in attendance to the

[V] See Kimhi's comment. **[W]** See Special Topics, "Medieval Jewish Philosophy."

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **31 And God saw all that He had made, and found it very good.** Notice that the words *ki tov* (OJPS "that it was good") appear twice on the sixth day, once for the creation of the animals and once for the creation of humanity (Hizkuni). It was man whom God found "very good," despite what He knew would eventually happen (Abarbanel). **The sixth day.** Making it "the" sixth day, with a ה, means that the initial letters of the last two words of ch. 1 and the first two words of ch. 2 spell the Tetragrammaton (Abarbanel).

NJPS [2]On the seventh day God finished the work that He had been doing, and He ceased on the seventh day from all the work that He had done. [3]And God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy, because

[2] וַיְכַל אֱלֹהִים בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי מְלַאכְתּוֹ
אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה וַיִּשְׁבֹּת בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי מִכָּל-
מְלַאכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה׃ [3] וַיְבָרֶךְ אֱלֹהִים
אֶת-יוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי וַיְקַדֵּשׁ אֹתוֹ כִּי בוֹ

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why does it say that God finished the work "on the seventh day" (v. 2)? Nothing was done on the seventh day! ✦ Isn't it redundant to add that "He ceased on the seventh day from all the work that He had done"? ✦ "God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy" (v. 3)—but how did He bless it, and in what way was it sanctified? ✦ Why did God sanctify the seventh day? If this sanctification had to do with the creation of the world, wouldn't it make more sense to sanctify the days on which creation actually occurred, and especially the first day, the day on which there was actual creation from nothing?

OJPS of them. [2]And on the seventh day God finished His work which He had made; and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had made. [3]And God blessed the seventh day, and hallowed it; because that in it He rested

RASHI **2:2 On the seventh day God finished the work.** R. Simeon says: One of flesh and blood, who cannot know precisely what instant of time it is, must begin sacred time earlier than necessary, and end it later than necessary, including a bit of non-sacred time at either end. The Holy One, who knows time precisely, can enter sacred time within a hair of the actual moment. So it appeared as if by the time He finished the work of creation it was already the seventh day. Another reading: What was the world lacking at the end of six days? Rest. Came the Sabbath, and with it came rest. Then the work of creation was finished and complete.

3 God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy. He blessed it with regard to the manna, providing for it with a double portion on Friday, and declared it holy with

RASHBAM **2:3 God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy.** By the time the sabbath arrived, the Holy One had already created all the food for his creatures and everything else they would need. The

KIMHI (Isa. 45:12). I commanded the sea to split for Moses; **[E]** the sun and moon to stand still for Joshua; **[F]** the ravens to feed Elijah; **[G]** the fire not to harm Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah; **[H]** the lions not to harm Daniel; **[I]** and the fish to swallow Jonah. **[J]** The same is true for all the other miracles.

3 God blessed the seventh day. On the Sabbath the soul has rest from its preoccupation with worldly things and can devote itself to wisdom and the words of God. **And declared it holy.** God blessed the Sabbath and declared it holy by commanding the

[E] See Exodus 14. **[F]** See Joshua 10. **[G]** See 1 Kings 17. **[H]** See Daniel 3, which uses their Babylonian names, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego. **[I]** See Daniel 6. **[J]** See Jonah 2.

NAHMANIDES right and to the left of Him" (1 Kings 22:19); "In that day, the LORD will punish the *host* of heaven in heaven and the kings of the earth on earth" (Isa. 24:21). Thus we have here in the story of creation an allusion to the creation of the angels. The souls of human beings are part of the host of heaven as well.

3 God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy. See Rashi's comment, which comes from Genesis Rabbah. And Saadia has been quoted as saying that it refers to those who *keep* the Sabbath. But the natural way to understand the verse is not that it is speaking about something in the future. Ibn Ezra's comment is quite correct for those who believe in it. For this is not actually perceptible to human senses. The Truth is that the blessing on the Sabbath day is a fount of blessing, and it is the foundation of the world. "Hallowing" it (see OJPS) really means arranging that it would draw from the realm of holiness. If you understand what I have just said, you will also understand the comment in Genesis Rabbah about the Sabbath, unlike the first six days, having no partner, and about the Assembly of Israel being its partner, **[X]** and you will comprehend that there is in Truth an extra soul on the Sabbath. **[Y]** **All the work of creation that He had done.** See the comments of Rashi and of Ibn Ezra. It seems to me that this expression is saying that He ceased "to make" (as the end of our verse literally says) anything more out of what He had created (from nothing). So He ceased both the "creating" of the first day and the "making" of the subsequent days. Perhaps it could be that the last Hebrew word of the verse really connects to "cease," which would make it "God ceased [from] doing all the work of creation." For comparable syntax, see the Hebrew of 11:8, 41:49, Exod. 19:12, 2 Chron. 8:15, and

[X] See Nahmanides' comment to "When God began to create" (1:1). **[Y]** Jews traditionally end the Sabbath by smelling sweet spices to revive themselves as this "extra soul" departs.

IBN EZRA sea" is not mentioned here, being included as a package with "the earth." The point was just to mention the upper and lower worlds, not their various components.

2 On the seventh day God finished the work. Some say that the days themselves were created, so that God "finished the work" by creating the seventh day. But this is hardly a finished explanation. (In fact, it is wrong.) Others think the Hebrew really means *"at* the seventh day," that is, just before it; compare "You shall not muzzle an ox *at* its threshing" (Deut. 25:4) and *"on* the very first day you shall remove leaven from your houses" (Exod. 12:15), which really means *"up to the beginning of* the first day." But why go to all this trouble? Finishing an action is not performing an action. It is rather saying that He performed *no* action. **That He had been doing.** On the sixth day. He had finished it before the Sabbath arrived. **He ceased on the seventh day.** He ceased on the seventh day from *all* the creating of the six prior days.

3 God blessed the seventh day. "Blessing" implies an abundance of good. On this day the body would be granted increased powers of generation, and the soul would be granted increased powers of intelligence and rationality. **And declared it holy.** By having no work done on it, as was

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **2:2 On the seventh day God finished the work.** No one could know at the end of the sixth day whether the work was finished; this could only be known once He did nothing on the seventh day. This I understood from R. Obadiah. But it seems to me that the cycle of the dominion of the seven planets, each over a particular day and a (different) particular night was not complete until the end of the seventh day, when the cycle had gone through one complete repetition (Bekhor Shor). Rather, as the verb is used in 2 Sam. 13:39 and Ps. 84:3, God "longed for" the work—He felt greatly attached to the intelligent order of the world. This is the reason for its continued existence (Gersonides). On the first six days, everything was created, but it remained in stasis. Now, on the seventh day, nature was set into motion (Abarbanel). **He ceased on the seventh day.** Rather, He "rested" on the seventh day (OJPS). You should not think waiting for the seven-day cycle to complete itself involved any work. It is like building a house one wall of which is to be provided by a tree. The house is not finished until the tree is fully grown, but that doesn't require you to do any work (Bekhor Shor). The phrase is by no means superfluous. At the beginning of the seventh day, nature began to operate, and the divine activity that had operated during the first six days ceased (Abarbanel).

3 God blessed. The phrase occurs also only in 9:1 and 25:11 (Masorah). **The seventh day.** Of every future week. He gave it the blessing of being readier than the other days to receive an additional soul and enhance the light of life (Sforno). **And declared it holy.** He

NJPS on it God ceased from all the work of creation that He **OJPS** from all His work which God in creating had made.

שָׁבַת֙ מִכָּל־מְלַאכְתּ֔וֹ אֲשֶׁר־בָּרָ֥א אֱלֹהִ֖ים

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why do vv. 1–4 speak sometimes of "creation" and sometimes merely of "making"? ✦ What is implied by "what God created to do" (as v. 3 literally says)? ✦ Why does the description of the seventh day not conclude with "And there was evening and there was morning" as the first six days do? ✦ If God could have created the world in one moment, why did He spend six days doing it? It is not as if He had to collect the supplies.

RASHI regard to the manna as well, seeing to it that no manna would fall on the seventh day. **[F]** This phrase, then, is written about what would happen in the future. **Because on it God ceased from all the work of creation that He had done.** Rather, "all . . . there was to do." As Genesis Rabbah explains, all the work that ought to have been done on the seventh day was done on the sixth day, on which double the amount of work was done.

[F] See Exodus 16.

KIMHI Israelites to do so. Their resting from work on the Sabbath testifies to the creation of the world and informs the entire world that the world did not preexist God; He created it in six days and rested on the seventh. There are natural signs of this too: a certain fish that will not swim on the Sabbath, but rests near shore or on a rock, and the famous river Sambatyon, whose powerful currents carry rocks six days a week, but which rests on the Sabbath.

RASHBAM sabbath was therefore blessed with all good things. Therefore, He declared it holy and had us rest on it in witness to the fact that He Himself first created everything and then rested. **[H]**

[H] See Rashbam's comment to Exod. 20:11.

IBN EZRA done on the other days. But Saadia thinks that blessing the seventh day and "hallowing" it (see OJPS) means that those who would keep the Sabbath would be blessed and hallowed. **All the work of creation that He had done.** Rather, "all the work that He had created to make"—the rootstocks of all the various species who would now "make" offspring of their own kind. For He had given them the power to reproduce their own likeness. I do not agree that the Hebrew infinitive in this verse signifies the past tense—nor that "making" is the same as "creating."

NAHMANIDES many more. But the word also implies that the six days are all that was created "for doing," implying that the six days of creation represent the 6,000 years that the world will last. That is why the Sages say that the "day" of the Holy One equals 1,000 years. The first two days had nothing but water, with no completed thing, corresponding to the first 2,000 years, during which there was no one "to invoke the LORD by name" (4:26). The light created on the first day corresponds to the first 1,000 years, the lifetime of Adam, who was the light of the world, acknowledging His Creator. (It could be that Enosh did not worship idols **[Z]** until his grandfather Adam was dead.) The separation caused by the firmament on the second day corresponds to the separation of the righteous Noah and his sons from the wicked who were sentenced to death by drowning. The third day has the appearance of the dry land and the plants, corresponding to the third 1,000 years, which began when Abraham was 48 years old, at which time he too first "invoked the LORD by name" (12:8) and "flourished" by attracting many people to know the Lord, as our tradition interprets "the souls that they had gotten in Haran" (12:5). For he was singled out to "instruct his children and his posterity to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is just and right" (18:19). This took its natural course until his descendants received the Torah at Sinai. The Temple was built on that same "day," at which point all the commandments (which are the "fruit" of the world) could finally be fulfilled. You must understand that twilight is already the beginning of the next day, which means that the era of each day would begin just slightly before it. Thus Abraham was born during the second millennium. You will find the same with each and every "day." The fourth day, on which the sun, moon, and stars were created, corresponds to the fourth millennium, which began just 72 years after the First Temple was built and lasted 172 years after the destruction of the Second Temple. During this "day," "all the Israelites enjoyed light" (Exod. 10:23), "for the Presence of the LORD filled the House of the LORD" (1 Kings 8:11). The light of Israel became a fire atop the altar, crouching there like a lion to consume the offerings. Then their light diminished and they were exiled, as the light of the moon disappears just before the birth of the new moon. But it shone on them again during the Second Temple, when the fire crouched atop the altar like a dog. **[A]** That evening, the two great lights set, and the Temple was destroyed. The fifth day, when the sea creatures and birds filled the earth, corresponds to the fifth millennium, which began 172 years after the destruction of the Second Temple. That is when the nations began their dominion, when "mankind [became] like the fish of the sea, like creeping things that have no ruler. He has fished them all up with a line, pulled them up in his trawl" (Hab. 1:14–15), and there was no one seeking the Lord. On the morning of the sixth day, the earth brought forth the various kinds of animals, and this actually occurred before sunrise: "When the sun rises, they come home and couch in their dens" (Ps. 104:22); then man was created, in the image of God, and began his period of dominion: "Man then goes out to his work, to his labor until the evening" (Ps. 104:23). That is the sixth millennium: At its beginning the animals have dominion—the kingdoms who do not know the Lord—but by the time the sun rises, after just one-tenth of the day, the redeemer will come, of whom it is said, "his throne is as the sun before Me" (Ps. 89:37). This is the son of David, made in the image of God: "One like a human being came with the clouds of heaven; he reached the Ancient of Days and was presented to Him. Dominion, glory, and kingship were given to him" (Dan. 7:13–14). This will be in the year 5118, when the word of the Lord spoken by Daniel will be fulfilled: "From the time the regular offering is abolished, and an appalling abomination is set up—it will be a thousand two hundred and ninety days" (Dan. 12:11). Based on the change of days from fish and birds to animals, it would seem that the beginning of the sixth millennium will be the time of the "fourth beast—fearsome, dreadful, and very powerful" (Dan. 7:7), a kingdom drawing closer to truth than the earlier ones. The seventh day, the Sabbath, alludes to the World to Come, which will be entirely Sabbath and eternal rest. May God preserve us during all these "days" and assign our lot with those who serve Him wholeheartedly.

[Z] See 4:26 and Rashi's comment there. **[A]** The "lion" and "dog" similes are found on B. Yoma 21b.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS "blessed" the operation of nature and "declared holy" the divine operation that had preceded it during the first six days (Abarbanel). **God ceased from all the work of creation that He had done.** But the seventh day did not require "there was evening and there was morning, a seventh day," which was used only to separate the works of one day from those of the next (Bekhor Shor).

NJPS had done. [4]Such is the story of heaven and earth when they were created.

When the LORD God made earth and heaven—[5]when no shrub of the field was yet on earth and no grasses of the field had yet sprouted, because the LORD God had not sent rain upon the earth and there was

✦ בְּהִבָּרְאָם

לַעֲשׂוֹת׃ פ [4] אֵלֶּה תוֹלְדוֹת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהָאָרֶץ בְּהִבָּרְאָם*
בְּיוֹם עֲשׂוֹת יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים אֶרֶץ וְשָׁמָיִם׃
[5] וְכֹל ׀ שִׂיחַ הַשָּׂדֶה טֶרֶם יִהְיֶה בָּאָרֶץ
וְכָל־עֵשֶׂב הַשָּׂדֶה טֶרֶם יִצְמָח כִּי לֹא
הִמְטִיר יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים עַל־הָאָרֶץ וְאָדָם

v. 4. ה׳ זעירא לפי נוסחים מקובלים

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ What are "the generations of the heaven and of the earth" (v. 4, OJPS)—are they the "flow" of v. 6? Or does the Hebrew word indeed imply a reference to the "story" (v. 4, NJPS) that has just been told? ✦ What is the point of adding the phrase "when they were created"? ✦ Why does the verse first say "heaven and earth" and then reverse it to "earth and heaven"? ✦ Why mention that before the creation of the plants "no shrub of the field was yet on earth and no grasses of the field had yet sprouted" (v. 5)? Obviously nothing existed before it came into being; and we are not told of any other creation that before it existed it did not exist. ✦ How can v. 5 tell us that the work of the third day of creation was not actually finished until later, when it finally rained and there were people "to till the soil"? Plants have no problem growing without people.

OJPS [4]These are the generations of the heaven and of the earth when they were created, in the day that the LORD God made earth and heaven.

[5]No shrub of the field was yet in the earth, and no herb of the field had yet sprung up; for the LORD God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there

RASHI **4 Such is the story of heaven and earth.** "These" things (as the Hebrew more literally says; see OJPS) does indeed refer to what has been written up to this point, not to what follows. **When they were created.** This phrase is a single Hebrew word, which can also be read to say, "He created them with ה," representing the Tetragrammaton: "For in Yah the LORD you have an everlasting Rock" (Isa. 26:4). With the two Hebrew letters of "Yah," י and ה, He formed two worlds. This world was created with ה, teaching you that from there they descend "to see the Pit" (Ps. 16:10), since ה is closed on all other sides but open at the bottom. **When the LORD God made earth and heaven.** Literally, "in the day that" the Lord God made earth and heaven. This teaches you that they were all indeed created on the first day.

5 No shrub of the field was yet on earth. The Hebrew word used here does indeed mean "not yet." It does not mean "before" (and no verb is formed from this root). For another example of it, see "I know that you and your courtiers do *not yet* fear the LORD God" (Exod. 9:30). This expression must therefore be understood the same way: when the creation of the world was finished, on the sixth day, before the creation of man, "when no shrub of the field was yet on earth." **No grasses of the field had yet sprouted.** On the third day "the earth brought forth vegetation" (1:12), but it stopped growing right at the surface of the earth and did not sprout until the sixth day. **The LORD God.** The Tetragrammaton, shown here as "LORD," is His name; "God" describes Him as judging and ruling over everything. That is the straightforward way to interpret this expression everywhere it occurs: "The LORD, who is God." **Had not sent rain upon the earth.** Why

IBN EZRA **4 Such is the story of heaven and earth.** Rather, "these are the generations of the heaven and of the earth" (OJPS)—these are what they produced. **When they were created.** When the expanse came into being (1:7) and the earth became visible (1:9). **When the LORD God made earth and heaven.** When He adjusted them. One "makes" ready something that already exists: "Abraham ran to the herd, took a calf, tender and choice, and gave it to a servant-boy, who hastened to *prepare* it" (18:7). Note also "All whom I have created, formed, and *made*" (Isa. 43:7)—in that order. Note that up to this point, the text has referred only to "God"; now it adds the Tetragrammaton: "LORD God." How precious are the words of those who transmitted our tradition! They said, "He was called by His full name only when the world itself was full." For up to that time there was no one in the world with the power to receive this name. With God's help, I will reveal the secret of this name and its grammatical use in this phrase in my comment to Exod. 3:15. **[S]**

5 No shrub. The Hebrew word can refer equally well to a tree (as it also does in Job 30:7). In my opinion, the word refers here to a fruit tree. It is used to introduce the

[S] Only a small portion of this essay-length comment is included in the *Commentators' Bible.*

KIMHI **4 Such is the story of heaven and earth.** "These" (as the Hebrew literally says—these things that happened on the six days of creation—"are the generations of the heaven and of the earth" (OJPS). Even though God did it all, He did it through intermediaries that generated all the different creatures. The intermediaries were heaven and earth.

5 When no shrub of the field was yet on earth. The text now begins to give us the details that were omitted in ch. 1. It is mostly about what happened to man, when he was created on the sixth day, but because of the tree of life and the tree of knowledge we are told here about the "shrubs" (in which trees are included). Even though the earth was told in 1:11 to "sprout vegetation," this was not

NAHMANIDES **4 Such is the story of heaven and earth when they were created.** More correctly, "this [that follows] is the nature of heaven and earth as they were created." The sky was set up to provide its dew and rain, the earth to yield its produce, both of which permit all living things to exist. As the Sages point out, בהבראם ("when they were created") can also be read as two words: בה׳ בראם ("He created them with the Name"). That is why only "God" has been mentioned up to this point. But the point is explicitly made in "All this was made by My hand, and thus it all came into being—declares the LORD" (Isa. 66:2) and "the hand of the LORD has done this" (Job 12:9). **When the LORD God made earth and heaven.** This phrase therefore does allude to the "beginning" of 1:1. See the last paragraph of my comment to that verse and the end of my comment to 1:2.

5 When no shrub of the field was yet on earth. According to Genesis Rabbah, the plants waited just at the surface of the earth from the third day until the sixth, when they sprouted after the Lord sent rain upon them. But in my opinion the plants achieved their full growth on the third day, just as the straightforward sense of the text would imply. What our verse is saying is that there was no one to plant or sow more crops from them. The earth would not continue to bloom until man was created to sow and plant and tend the

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **4 When they were created.** Note that the ה of the Hebrew phrase is to be written in miniature (Masorah). **Earth and heaven.** This phrase is also found only in Ps. 148:13 (Masorah). According to the Tanhuma, heaven was created first, but earth was adjusted and arranged first (Hizkuni).

5 The LORD God had not sent rain upon the earth and there was no man to till the soil. What the verse is saying is that no plants had grown, and there was no man, because the Lord God had not yet sent rain. The rain was absolutely essential if plants were to grow and man was to be formed from the dust (Abarbanel).

NJPS no man to till the soil, 6but a flow would well up from the ground and water the whole surface of the earth—7the LORD God formed man from the dust of the

OJPS was not a man to till the ground; 6but there went up a mist from the earth, and watered the whole face of the ground. 7Then the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his

אַ֣יִן לַעֲבֹ֣ד אֶת־הָֽאֲדָמָ֑ה׃ 6 וְאֵ֤ד יַֽעֲלֶה֙
מִן־הָאָ֔רֶץ וְהִשְׁקָ֖ה אֶת־כָּל־פְּנֵ֥י הָאֲדָמָֽה׃
7 וַיִּיצֶר֩ יְהוָ֨ה אֱלֹהִ֜ים אֶת־הָאָדָ֗ם עָפָר֙

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ If God did not make it rain until there were people to till the soil, wasn't it pointless to have a flow "well up from the ground and water the whole surface of the earth" (v. 6)? ✦ What is the connection between the sprouting of the plants and the formation of man (v. 7)? ✦ Why is the story of the creation of man repeated here? ✦ Why are we told that man was created "from the dust of the earth" like all the other animals, rather than being told (as in 1:27 and 5:1) that he was created "in the image of God"?

RASHI not? Because **there was no man to till the soil**. So there was no one who could recognize how good rain was for the world. When man came along and realized that rain was a necessity for the world, he prayed for it, it fell, and the trees and plants sprouted at last.

6 A flow would well up. Rather, "He caused a flow to well up"; the verb is a causative Hiphil, not a simple Qal. **[G]** He brought up the deep and watered the clouds, to moisten the dust so that man could be created—like a baker who adds water and then kneads the dough. Here too He first "watered" the earth and then "formed" man.

7 The LORD God formed man. "Formed" is spelled, unusually, with two יּ, implying two "formings," one for this world and one for the resurrection of the dead. Note that when the animals, who do not face judgment, are formed (in v. 19), the word is not spelled with two יּ. **From the dust of the earth**. He collected this dust from the four winds, from everywhere on earth, so that wherever man might die, the earth would take his dust back for burial. Another reading: He took the dust from the place of which it was said, "Make

[G] See Special Topics, "Biblical Hebrew."

IBN EZRA creation of man because man is frequently described using the image of a tree, with its trunk, branches, twigs, and so forth. **[T]**

6 A flow. Rather, "a mist" (OJPS), like a cloud of smoke. Our word is also used in "their day of *disaster*" (Deut. 32:35), for an evil day is often called "cloudy" or "gloomy." Here, the meaning is that this mist rose up from the earth (through the influence of the sun and moon) and watered the soil and caused it to sprout vegetation. But Saadia thinks this is a continuation of v. 5: no shrub was yet on earth, there was no man to till the soil, nor was there any mist to water the earth.

7 The LORD God formed man. Through the power of the sun and moon. **[U] From the dust of the earth**. You should know that the place from which this dust was taken was close to the garden. Some people think it was taken from the land of

[T] E.g., Ps. 1:3. See also Ibn Ezra's comment to Deut. 20:19. It is not clear (as some think) that Ibn Ezra has a specific biblical verse in mind for each of the Hebrew words he cites. **[U]** See Ibn Ezra's comment to "God separated the light from the darkness" (1:4).

KIMHI immediately possible, **because the LORD God had not sent rain upon the earth and there was no man to till the soil**, neither of which conditions had been met on the third day.

6 A flow would well up from the ground. There was still no man to till the soil, but not all plants require this—only those that man himself uses for food. From vv. 5–6 we see that the flow that wells up from the ground, by means of the nature God gave it, is the source of the rain that He sends upon the earth.

7 The LORD God formed man from the dust. Actually all four of the elements went into his creation, but as with all the land creatures, earth was the primary one. Similarly, water is the primary, but not the sole, element for fish, and air for birds. What happened was that a shape was formed from "[some] of *the* [finest] dust"; then this shape, by God's will, was turned into flesh, bone, and sinew. **Of the earth**. Of the finest earth. His body was made of purer stuff than those of the other animals, and his form was the most perfect of

NAHMANIDES growth. Note that our verse refers to shrubs of "the [cultivated] field," not of "the earth." (See Exod. 23:16 and Num. 20:17 for the use of "field" to refer to cultivated land.) That would be the normal course of things, starting after the six days of creation and forever more: water would rain from heaven and cause the seeds in the earth to sprout.

7 He blew into his nostrils the breath of life. The use of the full name "the LORD God" tells us the high level of this *neshamah*-soul, its basis and its mystery. It did not come from one of the four elements as the *nefesh*, the appetitive soul **[B]** evidently did. Nor did it devolve from the Separate Intelligences. It was the spirit of the Great Name, conveying knowledge and discernment directly from His mouth. For one who breathes into the mouth of another gives him some of his own breath: "Truly it is the *spirit* in men, the *breath* of Shaddai, that gives them understanding" (Job 32:8). For that is from the Foundation of Understanding according to the Way of Truth and Faith. As they say in the Sifrei, vows are like swearing by the king's life; oaths are like swearing by the king himself. "As the LORD lives and as you live" (2 Kings 4:30) serves as a reminder of this. As *the Midrash of R. Nehunya b. ha-Kaneh* **[C]** explains, "'On the seventh day He ceased from work and was refreshed [*va-yinnafash*]' [Exod. 31:17]—the Sabbath day sustains all souls [*nefashot*]." From this you will understand "uttering an oath by God" (Eccles. 8:2); a word to the wise is sufficient. But you must know that those who have studied the matter differ in their understanding of the human soul. Some say human beings have three souls: a vegetative soul that provides for growth, an appetitive soul that like of the animals and fish, and a rational soul. Others say the soul given us from on high is a single soul containing all three of these qualities. Our verse would seem to point in that direction, saying that the man was a lifeless lump, still as a stone, until the Holy One blew the *neshamah* of life into him and he became a living *nefesh*, the same expression used for the other creatures in 1:20 and 1:24. But the translation of Onkelos—that the man became a *speaking* being—shows him to be of the first opinion. He thinks that the *nefesh* blown into the man's nostrils here was the rational soul. Various rabbinic stories also point in this direction, and the verse "If He but intends it, He can call back His spirit [*ruaḥ*] and breath [*neshamah*]" (Job 34:14), if taken literally, shows that there are at least two. If that is correct, "forming" man in the first half of our verse would have to include animation and sense perception—that

[B] See Nahmanides' comment to "of living creatures" (1:20). **[C]** *Sefer ha-Bahir*.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **6 A flow would well up from the ground**. That is, the ground had not yet dried up from the water that had been moved off it (Bekhor Shor).

7 The LORD God formed man. The story is repeated here because man did not achieve his full completion at the moment of creation, nor even now—it would come to him only with great difficulty (Gersonides). These next two chapters are huge, both in their length and in their symbolism. But if they were strictly symbolic, they would have no business being written in the Torah; they would have been elsewhere in the Bible—as Job is (Abarbanel). **From the dust of the earth**. Rather, "of the dust from the earth"—"from" implying

NJPS earth. He blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being.

[8]The LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and placed there the man

מִן־הָאֲדָמָה וַיִּפַּח בְּאַפָּיו נִשְׁמַת חַיִּים
וַיְהִי הָאָדָם לְנֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה׃
8 וַיִּטַּע יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים גַּן־בְּעֵדֶן מִקֶּדֶם וַיָּשֶׂם

OJPS nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.

[8]And the LORD God planted a garden eastward, in Eden; and there He put the

RASHI for Me an altar of *earth*" (Exod. 20:21). **[H]** God thought, "If only there could be some way for him to make expiation, so that he can continue to exist." **He blew into his nostrils the breath of life.** He made him of both lower materials and higher ones, his body of the lower ones and his soul of the higher ones. In just this same way, on the first day He created the heaven (higher) and the earth (lower); on the second day He created the firmament (higher) and on the third day the dry land (lower); on the fourth day He created the lights (higher) and on the fifth day the sea creatures (lower). So on the sixth day He needed to create something for both the higher and lower worlds. Otherwise there would be jealousy between them; one of them would have gotten an extra day's worth of creation. **A living being.** More precisely, "a living soul" (OJPS). The wild beasts and the animals are similarly called "living" (1:24), but the soul of man is the most "living" of all, since intelligence and speech were added to it.

Should you object that God has already created man, I must tell you what I saw in the *Baraita of R. Eliezer b. R. Yose the Galilean*, among the 32 rules by which the Torah is explicated. Here is one of them: when a general statement is followed by a longer narrative, the narrative gives the details of the general statement. "God created man" (1:27) is the general statement; it tells us nothing about how man was created or what happened afterward. Our chapter, therefore, explains in detail how He formed him (here in v. 7): He planted a garden for him (v. 8), He put the man in the garden (v. 15), cast a deep sleep upon him (v. 21), and so forth. It sounds as if this is a completely different story, but it is simply giving the details of the original statement. It is the same with the animals, where v. 19 explains how they were named (and teaches us that the birds were formed from silt). **[I]**

8 In Eden, in the east. That is, the garden was planted on the east side of Eden.

[H] The place where the Temple would one day stand. **[I]** See Rashi's first comment to v. 19.

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Again, why are we told that "man became a living being," using language equally appropriate for animals? ✦ If God "planted a garden in Eden" (v. 8) already on the third day, why are we not told this in the previous chapter? But if He planted it only now, then the divine work of creation was not finished in six days!

RASHBAM **8 The LORD God planted a garden in Eden.** In the country of Eden, the country inhabited by the "Bethedenites" of Isa. 37:12.

IBN EZRA Israel, but they have forgotten that "they migrated from the east" (11:2). **He blew into his nostrils the breath of life.** For man would live by means of the breath of his nostrils, which exhale the air heated by the warmth of the heart and bring in fresh air. **Man became a living being.** He came to life, able to move immediately like the other animals, not like a newborn baby. With respect to this kind of "soul" (OJPS)—the *nefesh*—he was like the animals. But I have looked through all our books and not found the "breath"—the *neshamah*—except in connection with man alone.

8 The LORD God planted a garden in Eden. Rather, He *had* planted a garden, in which He now placed the man. **In the east.** The translations are correct. **[V]** This is "the garden of God" (Ezek. 28:13). **The man.** Literally "the Adam," which conceals some mysterious meaning. There are two other

[V] See Kimhi's comment. Ibn Ezra is saying that the preexistence of the garden is indicated by the verb at the beginning of the verse.

KIMHI all. That is why he walks upright. **He blew into his nostrils the breath of life.** He blew into him some of the higher spirits—not like the *nefesh* that the earth brought forth in 1:24. Here, it does not say *ruaḥ* ("wind") or *nefesh*, but *neshamah* ("breath"), even though both of those other words are also sometimes used for the spirit in a human being. Once again: it is the "breath" of life for humans, the "wind" of life for other animals (see 7:22). As the philosophers tell us, the human soul is threefold: one for growth, one for sense perception and movement, and one for intelligence. **And man became a living being.** One reason human children do not walk immediately (as Adam did) is that they are nourished in the womb by what would otherwise be their mother's menstrual blood; other animals are nourished by what their mothers eat, which is healthier.

8 The LORD God planted a garden. That is, He *had* caused it to come into existence, on day three. "The LORD God" is mentioned here (unlike there) because of the great importance of this garden. **Eden.** That is, "bliss." It was a place of rich growth, whose vegetation was of great delight both to body and soul. R. Judah says, based on Ezek. 28:13 and 31:9, that the garden was bigger than Eden; R. Yose, based on our verse, says Eden was bigger than the garden. This still left R. Yose outnumbered two verses to one, until (says R. Hanin of Sepphoris) the Holy One opened his eyes and showed him Isa. 51:3. **In the east.** Eden is in the east. But the same phrase can mean

NAHMANIDES is, the *nefesh*—as it apparently does for the animals in v. 19. In that case, the infusion of the *neshamah* would indeed be the rational soul. But the ל prefix of the final Hebrew phrase ("to") would not mean that he *turned into* a living "soul" but that he *belonged to* a living soul. Or it is saying that he once again became a living soul, "another man" (1 Sam. 10:6). All the qualities with which he had been formed now became and belonged to this latter soul, the *neshamah*.

8 The LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east. See Rashi's comment. But Onkelos's understanding of the Hebrew for "in the east" as "of old"—which we also find in Genesis Rabbah—is the correct one. So "planted" does not mean that the Holy One brought trees from elsewhere and put them in the ground; it means that He caused them to sprout there (see v. 9). This is "the planting of the LORD" (Isa. 61:3). Even before saying "Let the earth sprout vegetation" (1:11), He decreed that this spot would be a garden—this tree here and that one there, a garden with a design, unlike the rest of the world, where plants grew everywhere in no particular order. The trees of the garden were designed so as to grow properly and always bear fruit without needing to be tended or trimmed; their roots would not grow old in the earth, nor would their stumps die in the ground. After the humans were expelled from the garden, who was there to tend it? This too is implied by our verse: "They are the shoot that I planted, My handiwork in which I glory" (Isa. 60:21). As Ezekiel says

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS selection of the finest (Sforno). **He blew into his nostrils the breath of life.** He wanted to give him the ability to name the animals correctly (Hizkuni). Vv. 6–7 all took place on Day Six, when God's will was still the cause of all and nature had not yet begun to operate (Abarbanel).

8 The LORD God planted. See also (without "God") Num. 24:6 (Masorah). **A garden in Eden.** You see that the garden was not created on Day Three, but on Day Six—after the man. And it was not on the equator, as some think, but in the land that would later be

NJPS whom He had formed. 9And from the ground the LORD God caused to grow every tree that was pleasing to the sight and good for food, with the tree of life in the middle of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and bad.

שָׁ֣ם אֶת־הָאָדָ֖ם אֲשֶׁ֥ר יָצָֽר׃ 9 וַיַּצְמַ֣ח יְהוָ֣ה אֱלֹהִ֗ים מִן־הָ֙אֲדָמָ֔ה כָּל־עֵ֛ץ נֶחְמָ֥ד לְמַרְאֶ֖ה וְטֹ֣וב לְמַאֲכָ֑ל וְעֵ֤ץ הַחַיִּים֙ בְּתֹ֣וךְ הַגָּ֔ן וְעֵ֖ץ הַדַּ֥עַת טֹ֖וב וָרָֽע׃

OJPS man whom He had formed. 9And out of the ground made the LORD God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

RASHI **9 From the ground the LORD God caused to grow every tree.** "From the ground" of the garden. **In the middle of the garden.** Not merely "in" the garden, as the Hebrew might be taken to mean, but precisely in the middle.

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ V. 9 tells us that "the tree of life" was "in the middle of the garden," implying that "the tree of knowledge of good and bad" was not there; yet in 3:3 Eve tells the snake that the latter tree was also "in the middle of the garden." In truth, weren't all the trees "in the midst of the garden"? ✦ How could eating a piece of fruit give someone intelligence—let alone eternal life? This is simply inconceivable.

KIMHI "of old," and our Sages take it to mean that the garden was created (on day three) before the man (on day six); others of them actually take it to mean that the garden (mystically) preceded the creation of the world. **And placed there the man whom He had formed.** The man was "placed" there—that is, assigned there—for the purpose for which he had been formed: to till it and enjoy its fruits, and to keep the animals out of it. Note that at this point he is still "the" *adam*; it is as yet not a name but a description. The "mysterious meaning" to which Ibn Ezra alludes is (in my opinion) that it refers not to an individual, but to the species as a whole.

9 From the ground. Of the garden. **Every tree that was pleasing to the sight and good for food.** Every tree in the garden produced something edible, much better than any other food in the world, and all the trees were beautiful, too. Admittedly, Adam spent next to no time there (until afterward, when he repented), **[K]** and his sons Cain and Abel were never there at all. But it is preserved for the People of Israel, who will enjoy its fruits in the days of the Messiah. For they all will know the Lord, and this garden was created for them. As with everything else in the story, there is something revealed about this and also something hidden. **With the tree of life in the middle of the garden.** Not just "in the midst" (OJPS), but precisely in the middle, where it could be most easily protected, as one wraps

[K] See Kimhi's comment to "to guard the way to the tree of life" (3:24).

IBN EZRA such examples: "the" Manasseh (Deut. 3:13) and "the" Araunah (2 Sam. 24:16). But here it could be because "Adam" is a name derived from *adamah*, "earth" or "ground." So it is both the proper name Adam and the noun "earthling."

9 From the ground the LORD God caused to grow every tree. When He caused every tree to grow forth from the ground, they grew forth in Eden as well. But in Eden there were two trees that grew only there and nowhere else. **The tree of life.** We have no way of knowing by straightforward interpretation which tree this was. But we certainly know that there are healthy fruits and harmful ones, some that lengthen life and some that kill you instantly. **The tree of knowledge of good and bad.** Some think this was a fig tree, but if it were, 3:7 would say so explicitly. Grammatically, there is a word missing here; the definite article in "the tree of *the* knowledge" (OJPS) shows that "knowledge" cannot be in construct with "good and bad." The most obvious solution is that the Hebrew is short for "the tree of knowledge, the knowledge of good and bad." You will find similar cases of a single word where grammatically the word

NAHMANIDES of the trees watered by the stream from the future Temple, "Their leaves will not wither nor their fruit fail; they will yield new fruit every month" (Ezek. 47:12). What then can it mean that the Holy One put the man in the garden "to till it and tend it" (v. 15)? That he was intended to grow wheat and other produce for himself, sowing and reaping and eating whatever he wanted. He would "till and tend" his own vegetable plot. The trees of the "garden" (really an orchard) would not require any tending. Notice that "it" of v. 15 is feminine, while the Hebrew for "garden" is masculine. (Admittedly there is an alternate form of the word that is feminine; see Isa. 61:11 and Jer. 29:5.) Our Sages in Genesis Rabbah were certainly aware of the feminine suffixes in v. 15; they applied them to the sacrificial offerings. See my comment there.

9 With the tree of life in the middle of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and bad. Since the tree of life is not identified, even in the command of vv. 16–17 (see 3:3), in any other way than as being "in the middle of the garden," this must mean (as Onkelos takes it) that the tree was in the precise center of the garden. If he is correct that both these trees were in the center of the garden, there must have been a special garden plot there, rather large and separate from the rest of the garden, that contained them. For the precise center of a circle is impossible for anyone but the Holy One to locate. The tree of life was obviously a tree whose fruit gives those who eat it long life. The tree of knowledge of good and bad, the commentators say, had a fruit that gives rise to lust (which is why they covered themselves up after eating it). They compare the question of Barzillai, "Can I tell the difference between good and bad?" (2 Sam. 19:36), which they interpret to mean that he no longer had any sexual desire. But to me "you will be like divine beings who know good and bad" (3:5) shows that this cannot be correct. You may think the serpent was lying to her, but our tradition admits he told the truth; and see "the LORD God said, 'Now that the man has become like one of us, knowing good and bad'" (3:22). The explanation that seems best to me is that man would have done what was naturally proper for him to do, just like the heavens and all their host, surely, reliably, and without emotion; but the fruit of that tree engendered will and desire, so that those who ate it could choose a thing or its opposite, good or bad. That is why it was called "the tree of *knowledge* of good and bad," since in Hebrew that word "knowledge" can also refer to intention. Barzillai simply no longer cared about life. He could not taste anything he ate, and he could hear music but took no pleasure in it. Originally the man and his wife did not have sex for pleasure, merely (when the time came) for reproduction. So their genitals were no different to them than their faces or their hands. Once they ate from the tree they had the possibility of choosing to do

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS called the land of Israel; in fact, it was on the spot where one day the Temple and Jerusalem, the holy city, would be built (Abarbanel). **And placed there the man whom He had formed.** He was formed elsewhere so he could see that it was full of thorns and thistles, and would realize what a special place the garden was (Hizkuni).

9 From the ground the LORD God caused to grow every tree. In this story, a "tree" is metaphorical for comprehension, as in Prov. 3:18, where comprehension of Torah is described as "a tree of life to those who grasp her" (Gersonides). **The tree of knowledge of good and bad.** The ability to choose something pleasant even if it is bad for one and to reject something unpleasant even if it is beneficial (Sforno).

NJPS [10]A river issues from Eden to water the garden, and it then divides and becomes four branches. [11]The name of the first is Pishon, the one that winds through the whole land of Havilah, where the gold is. ([12]The gold of that land is good; bdellium is there, and lapis lazuli.) [13]The name of the second river is Gihon, the one that

10 וְנָהָר֙ יֹצֵ֣א מֵעֵ֔דֶן לְהַשְׁקוֹת֙ אֶת־הַגָּ֔ן
וּמִשָּׁ֖ם יִפָּ֣רֵד וְהָיָ֑ה לְאַרְבָּעָ֖ה רָאשִֽׁים׃
11 שֵׁ֚ם הָאֶחָ֣ד פִּישׁ֔וֹן הֽוּא֙ הַסֹּבֵ֔ב אֵ֖ת
כָּל־אֶ֣רֶץ הַֽחֲוִילָ֑ה אֲשֶׁר־שָׁ֖ם הַזָּהָֽב׃
12 וּזְהַ֥ב הָאָ֛רֶץ הַה֖וּא ט֑וֹב שָׁ֣ם הַבְּדֹלַ֔ח
וְאֶ֥בֶן הַשֹּֽׁהַם׃ 13 וְשֵׁ֥ם־הַנָּהָ֖ר הַשֵּׁנִ֣י גִיחֽוֹן

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why do vv. 11–12 tell us both the location of the Pishon and the natural resources of that land, when vv. 13–14, for the Gihon and the Tigris, tell us the location only, and for the Euphrates not even that? ✦ Why does the text always tell us in connection with the garden that the Lord God "did" this or that; yet the rivers simply issue forth on their own?

OJPS [10]And a river went out of Eden to water the garden; and from thence it was parted, and became four heads. [11]The name of the first is Pishon; that is it which compasseth the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold; [12]and the gold of that land is good; there is bdellium and the onyx stone. [13]And the name of the second river is Gihon; the same is it that compasseth

RASHI **11 Pishon.** This is the river of Egypt, the Nile. The name is connected with the verb in Hab. 1:8, "Their steeds *rush on*"—this river rises bountifully and waters the whole land. Another reading: it is called Pishon because it grows flax (*pishtim*), connected with Egypt in "The flax workers, too, shall be dismayed" (Isa. 19:9).

13 Gihon. This name refers to the pounding of this river and the great sound it makes: in Hebrew, the word is actually related to "When an ox *gores* a man or a woman to death" (Exod. 21:28), because the more the ox gores, the more it roars. **Cush.** Like Asshur in the next verse, Cush did not of course exist yet. The names are written here because that is how these lands would eventually be identified.

IBN EZRA should be repeated in "the Ark of the Covenant" (Josh. 3:14) and "the prophecy of Oded the prophet" (2 Chron. 15:8). There are many more cases of this kind.

10 A river issues from Eden. Rather, "a river was issuing from Eden" even before the man was created, watering it in every direction. **To water the garden.** For the man to water it (see v. 15). **Four branches.** Literally, "four heads" (OJPS).

11 The name of the first is Pishon. Saadia takes the Pishon to be the Nile; see, however, my comment to v. 14.

12 The gold of that land is good. The purpose of saying this is to lavish praise on the river that issues forth from the garden. But I have seen a river with gold in it in Spain, too. **Bdellium is there.** According to Saadia, "bdellium" refers to small, round stones, very fine, that come out of the water; **[W]** they somewhat resemble grains of manna. Num. 11:7, though, merely says that the *color* of the manna was "like bdellium." **Lapis lazuli.** He also says that the Hebrew word here refers to a precious stone that is pure white—but we really do not know.

13 The name of the second river is Gihon. This river is near the land of Israel, as is clear from David's telling his courtiers to "bring [Solomon] down to Gihon" (1 Kings 1:33); it is in the southeast. The Euphrates too (v. 14) is near the land of Israel, serving as its far eastern border.

[W] Saadia translates it as "pearls."

KIMHI something precious inside other things to keep it safe. The nature of this tree was that it could strengthen the nature of the person who ate from it so that he could live a very long time. But, according to the allegorical meaning of the text, he could live forever. **The tree of knowledge of good and bad.** It was next to the tree of life.

10 A river issues from Eden to water the garden. The man was "to till it and tend it" (v. 15), but there was no need to water it; the river took care of that. **It then divides.** After it comes out of the garden. **And becomes four branches.** Each of which is also called a river. The Hebrew literally says "heads" (OJPS), that is, sources for each of the four branches.

11 The name of the first is Pishon, the one that winds through the whole land of Havilah. Havilah is apparently quite near the location of the garden, which is why it gets special mention here. This river does not flow straight, but flows all the way around that land (see OJPS) and then eastward to the sea. The name of the river refers to its power of making the seeds it waters incredibly fertile; Onkelos translates "be fertile" (1:28) with a verb from this root. **Where the gold is.** "The" superior gold for which that land is known (see v. 12). Gold is the best and purest of metals.

12 Bdellium. According to the Sages, this is a small, white, round stone, made from drops of the dew that falls on that river. They are so small that nothing practical can be made from a single one of them; instead, they are strung together to make a necklace. That is why the text does not call it "the bdellium stone" as it does with the **lapis lazuli** or "onyx stone" (as OJPS more literally and correctly translates). This is a large stone, also white, from which various articles are made for great kings. It is so important, and so free of all impurity, that it was chosen to have "the names of the sons of Israel" (Exod. 28:9) engraved on it.

13 The name of the second river is Gihon, the one that winds through the whole land of Cush. From which it flows into Serendip, the great southern ocean. For the name, see "the stream will *gush* at his command" (Job 40:23). The Siloam spring is also called the Gihon (see 1 Kings), because it too splits into many different channels to water the gardens of Jerusalem.

NAHMANIDES good or evil (to themselves or others), giving them divine characteristics on the one hand and the evils of impulse and appetite on the other. "God made men plain, but they have engaged in too much reasoning" (Eccles. 7:29) may have this in mind—one straight path versus a multiplicity of choice. But note that (as the woman told the serpent) the Holy One did *not* mention this quality when He issued the command; He merely called it "the tree in the middle of the garden" (3:3). Here in v. 17 the text has put the description of the tree in God's mouth strictly to let *us* know about this tree.

11 The name of the first is Pishon. Some of the earlier commentators think this is the Nile, which flows through Egypt and into the Mediterranean Sea at Alexandria. But see my next comment. **The whole land of Havilah, where the gold is.** *Not*, therefore, "Havilah, by Shur, which is close to Egypt" (25:18); this one is in the Far East. Both this gold and the bdellium and lapis lazuli of v. 12 are said in praise of this river. All of them were found in its sand and along its banks. Silver is found in some rivers too.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **11 The whole land of Havilah, where the gold is.** There were two different "lands of Havilah," as you see from Gen. 10:7 and 29; but there was only one Cush (v. 13) and one Asshur (v. 14), so these did not need to be further identified (Bekhor Shor). Rashi says this river is the Nile, but Christian scholars say that it is the Ganges and Havilah is a region in India (Abarbanel).

12 The gold of that land is good. It was so good that you could mix copper with it and it would still look good (Hizkuni). **Bdellium.** This word occurs nowhere else but Num. 11:7 (Masorah). The four rivers symbolize four aspects of creation: mineral, vegetable, animal, and human (Abarbanel).

13 Gihon. This name occurs six times with variant spellings; see 1 Kings 1:33, 38, and 45; 2 Chron. 32:30 and 33:14 (Masorah).

NJPS winds through the whole land of Cush. [14]The name of the third river is Tigris, the one that flows east of Asshur. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.

[15]The LORD God took the man and placed him in the garden of Eden, to till it

OJPS the whole land of Cush. [14]And the name of the third river is Tigris; that is it which goeth toward the east of Asshur. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.

[15]And the LORD God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it

הַוּא הַסּוֹבֵב אֵת כָּל־אֶרֶץ כּוּשׁ׃ 14 וְשֵׁם
הַנָּהָר הַשְּׁלִישִׁי חִדֶּקֶל הוּא הַהֹלֵךְ קִדְמַת
אַשּׁוּר וְהַנָּהָר הָרְבִיעִי הוּא פְּרָת׃
15 וַיִּקַּח יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאָדָם וַיַּנִּחֵהוּ

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why does the text repeat that "the LORD God took the man and placed him in the garden of Eden" (v. 15) when we know this already from v. 8? ✦ Why tell us that God put the man in the garden "to till it and tend it"? This was not the purpose of his creation or of putting him in the garden.

RASHI **14 Tigris.** Hebrew *ḥiddekel*. Its waters are crisp (*ḥaddin*) and swift (*kallin*). **Euphrates.** Its waters are fertile (*parrin*) and abundant (*rabbin*), and they are invigorating. It is identified simply by name because it was the most important river of them all, mentioned here because of its connection with the land of Israel. **[J]**

15 The LORD God took the man. "Took" him with words, persuading him to enter.

[J] See Rashi's comment to Deut. 1:7.

KIMHI **14 The name of the third river is Tigris, the one that flows east of Asshur.** Rather than all around it, as did the first two rivers. This is the northern river of the four; Assyria and Babylonia are to the north of the garden. This river flows into the northern side of the great sea. **And the fourth river is the Euphrates.** As this would eventually be one of the borders of the land of Israel, **[L]** it needed no further explanation here. This river is west of all the countries so far mentioned; in Israel, it flows into the Mediterranean Sea. This paragraph tells us that Moses (peace be upon him) wrote all this by means of the Holy Spirit, as dictated by the Almighty. How else could Moses know all these things in Genesis? He was writing the Torah in the middle of the wilderness. Who told him all this? On whom could he rely for all the narratives in which there are no laws or commandments? Obviously God told him all these things, by means of the Holy Spirit, in order to establish the details of the creation of the world. This is how Moses recorded everything from creation up until the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt. And of course there is an allegorical interpretation too.

15 The LORD God took the man and placed him in the garden of Eden. The narrative that began in v. 8 is resumed. For "took," compare "I took your father Abraham from beyond the Euphrates" (Josh. 24:3). In this case, why was the man not created in the garden to begin with? To give him a special affection for the garden. He would understand God's moving him there as a special favor. **To till it and tend it.** The man was to weed and hoe the vegetables and trees for his food, and to "keep it" (OJPS) protected from animals and birds, as far as he was able.

[L] According to Deut. 11:24.

NAHMANIDES **15 To till it and tend it.** Genesis Rabbah applies this expression to the sacrifices, **[D]** to which the same (Hebrew) verbs are applied in "You shall *worship* God at this mountain" (Exod. 3:12) and "*Be punctilious* in presenting to Me at stated times the offerings of food due Me" (Num. 28:2). By this they meant that plants and animals both have need of the primary forces if they are to grow. The sacrifices provide a conduit to the upper realms, from there to the plants in the garden of Eden, and from there to the world, in rains of benevolence and blessing: "The trees of the LORD drink their fill, the cedars of Lebanon, His own planting" (Ps. 104:16). See my comment to 1:11.

[D] Perhaps connecting the surprising feminine suffixes here with *minḥah*, "offering." See further the end of Nahmanides' comment to 3:22.

IBN EZRA **14 The name of the third river is Tigris.** This (according to the commentators) is the second of the rivers (with the Euphrates) that flows past Baghdad. If so, then three of the four rivers are in the east. Now, the Nile has its source in the Mountains of the Moon, **[X]** far to the south of the equator. The fact that it rises in the summer is proof of this. Yet we know that Eden was right on the equator, where day and night are precisely the same length every day of the year. (Some brainless people do not understand how this is possible, but it has been scientifically proven.) All this would mean that the Pishon would have to flow southwest from Eden and then turn around and flow back north! In fact, there is no proof that the Pishon is the Nile; Saadia simply assumed this. There is certainly no tradition that would support this identification. (He translated "Havilah" of v. 11 to fit it.) He made many similar assumptions, about names and places, animals, birds, and minerals. Some of his identifications are completely wrong, as I shall demonstrate in the proper places. Perhaps he saw them in a dream. But we need not rely on his dreams. No doubt he did all this in God's honor, in order to be able to translate the Torah into Arabic, so they could not say, "There are words **[Y]** in the Torah that they don't even know!" Tradition gives midrashic explanations for the names of all these rivers, though they could not cross the Tigris until they split that name into two separate words. **[Z]**

15 To till it. "It" has the feminine gender in Hebrew; as we see from its plural forms, "garden" can be either gender. Some think the suffix refers to the "ground" of v. 9, but it is much more plausible that he would be tilling and tending a garden than the "ground" of the entire earth. After he sinned, of course, God removed him from the garden and did set him to tilling "the ground" (3:23, OJPS). If he was already tilling the ground, what exactly would the *curse* of tilling the ground consist of? But really in our verse he was merely to till "the garden," which means nothing more than to water the trees whose fruit he would eat. Afterward, though, he really was forced to get his food by tilling the ground—from bread that he had to make from the plants that grew out of the ground. The verb literally means "to serve it," so some think the suffix refers to the commandment given him in the next verse; but one does not "serve" a commandment. **Tend it.** That is, to protect it, to "keep it" (OJPS) safe from the wild animals who might enter it and foul it.

[X] Another version of this comment reads "the Mountain of Frankincense," a slight difference in the Hebrew. **[Y]** Our texts of Ibn Ezra mistakenly say "commandments," a slight error in the Hebrew. **[Z]** See Rashi's comments to vv. 11–14.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **15 To till it and tend it.** Rather, to "work" it for six days, as in Deut. 5:13, "Six days you shall *labor*," and to "keep" it (see OJPS) on the Sabbath, as in Deut. 5:12, "*Observe* the sabbath day" (Hizkuni). This "tilling" and "tending" refers to engaging in acquisition of concepts in such a way as to bring the garden's potential into actuality. God had already placed in man a drive to actualize his own intellectual potential (Gersonides).

NJPS and tend it. 16And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you are free to eat; 17but as for the tree of knowledge of good and bad, you must not eat of it; for as soon as you eat of it, you shall die."

בְּגַן־עֵדֶן לְעָבְדָהּ וּלְשָׁמְרָהּ׃ 16 וַיְצַו יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים עַל־הָאָדָם לֵאמֹר מִכֹּל עֵץ־הַגָּן אָכֹל תֹּאכֵל׃ 17 וּמֵעֵץ הַדַּעַת טוֹב וָרָע לֹא תֹאכַל מִמֶּנּוּ כִּי בְּיוֹם אֲכָלְךָ מִמֶּנּוּ מוֹת תָּמוּת׃

OJPS and to keep it. 16And the LORD God commanded the man, saying: "Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat; 17but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it; for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die."

KIMHI **16 The LORD God commanded the man.** The commandment comes in v. 17, *not* to eat. **Of every tree of the garden you are free to eat.** Or perhaps this is also a commandment. The Hebrew syntax might well mean "you must certainly eat." The infinitive absolute combined with a finite verb from the same root **[M]** is used for emphasis (e.g., Deut. 11:13,22). This would mean that the man was commanded to keep himself alive by eating what was permitted to him. But our Sages had a tradition that he was given six commandments: these two, and the prohibitions against idol worship, cursing God, spilling blood, and sexual immorality. The seventh commandment to which all human beings are subject was the prohibition of eating flesh torn from a living animal; this commandment was given to Noah. There was no need to give it to Adam because he was not a meat-eater.

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why would God command the man not to eat of "the tree of knowledge of good and bad" (v. 17), preventing him from reaching his ultimate goal? ✦ If the command was due to the fact that the tree contained bad as well as good, why not simply fix the tree so that it had good but no bad? ✦ If it was impossible to remove the bad from the tree, why plant it in the garden at all? Doesn't this amount to placing "a stumbling block before the blind" (Lev. 19:14)? ✦ Saying that "as soon as you eat of it, you shall die" implies that if he did not eat, he would live forever, like the heavenly beings. But doesn't "dust you are, and to dust you shall return" (3:19) prove that eternal life is incompatible with the material nature of man? ✦ Why was the threat that "as soon as you eat of it, you shall die" not carried out?

17 As for the tree of knowledge of good and bad. Literally, *"of* the tree" (OJPS), perhaps redundantly for emphasis. One might say that death was what Adam will be cursed with in ch. 3, taking "bad" as death and "good" as life. The commentators take "knowledge of good and bad" to refer to knowledge of sex, since this fruit aroused lust. "Good" would refer to permitted sex, "bad" to forbidden sex. They understood the difference between good and bad in general perfectly well before eating the fruit; they simply had no sexual desire until they ate it (see 3:7). **You must not eat of it.** Literally, *"from* it," so if the two *of*s are not redundant this phrase would mean "you must not eat of what comes from it"—the fruit. Notice that he was *not* commanded not to eat of the tree of life. It was one of the trees of which he was "free to eat" (v. 16). **As soon as you eat of it.** Literally, on "the day" you eat of it (OJPS). As our Sages explain, the Holy One's "day"

[M] See Special Topics, "Biblical Hebrew."

NAHMANIDES **17 As for the tree of knowledge of good and bad.** See the end of my comment to v. 9. **You must not eat of it.** Of its fruit (see 3:3), that is, not of the tree, which was not edible. Both 3:17 and 2 Kings 18:31 use the same figure of speech. **As soon as you eat of it, you shall die.** That is, "you will have committed a capital crime." It does not mean that he would literally die on that "day" (OJPS), nor that he would suddenly know that he was going to die (which the living all know). Rather, like Shimei in 1 Kings 2:42, he would have earned death, and he would be executed at the king's pleasure. The same applies to "let them not go inside and witness the dismantling of the sanctuary, lest they die" (Num. 4:20) and "lest they incur guilt thereby and die for it" (Lev. 22:9). The natural philosophers tell us that the man was destined for ultimate death from the start because he was compounded of several elements together. Now, however, it was decreed that if he should sin he would die for his sin, at the hands of heaven, just as does anyone who violates the various other commandments that fall into this category—officiating in the Temple while drunk and the like. All such people die before their time. "For dust you are [by nature], and to dust you shall return" (3:19). Since previous to the command he did have to eat, the philosophers say, he was certainly already in the realm of growth and decay. But the Sages say that if he had not sinned, he would have never died, for the (higher) *neshamah* provides eternal life. Certainly the divine will that was put in him when he was formed would have cleaved to him permanently and kept him alive forever. See once more my comment to "God saw that the light was good" (1:4). Moreover, you should understand that

RASHBAM **17 For as soon as you eat of it, you shall die.** The introduction of death into the world was not a punishment, but simply an effect of eating this fruit. Had he eaten from the tree of life, who could

IBN EZRA **16 The LORD God commanded the man.** A command that is issued "upon" someone (as this one literally is in the Hebrew) is a prohibition: "I will command *upon* the clouds to drop no rain on it" (Isa. 5:6).

17 The tree of knowledge of good and bad. He must have shown him where it was, since his wife knew that it was "in the middle of the garden" (3:3). **You must not eat of it.** Even though in general I gave you permission to eat from the trees in the garden. — "Of it" is redundant (see OJPS for the more literal translation that makes this clear), but language frequently employs redundancy (see the Hebrew of Exod. 2:6 for another such example). Or perhaps the implication is "You must not eat *any* of it." You will find a complete analysis of the Hebrew word translated "of it" in my *Basic Hebrew Grammar*. **[A]** You must realize that the man was full of knowledge already at this point; the Holy One could not command someone who wasn't. It was only in this one aspect, sexual desire, that he did not have "knowledge of good and bad." Clearly, the fact that he gave names to each of the animals according to its nature (see v. 20) shows us that he was wise indeed. He must have been. The Holy One would not have brought all His creatures to see what the man would call them if He had known that he was stupid. **As soon as you eat of it.** More literally, "on the day that you eat of it" (compare OJPS). Jonah ibn Janah thinks this "day" is the 1,000-year day of the midrash. **[B]** Others explain that Adam died on a Friday, the same day of the week on which

[A] *Sefer ha-Yesod.* **[B]** See Kimhi's comment.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **16 The LORD God commanded the man.** The Holy One was not testing the man for His own sake, but as a concession to the angels of mercy, to prove to them that man would not stand up to the test. But the Hebrew does not use a direct object; rather, the command was issued "upon" the man and all his descendants (Hizkuni). **Of every tree of the garden you are free to eat.** That is, metaphorically, to "comprehend" something (Gersonides).

17 As for the tree of knowledge of good and bad. "Knowledge" as in "the man *knew* his wife" (4:1). It was a tree that awakened lust. A little of this is "good" for reproduction, but a lot of it is "bad" because it keeps man from achieving completeness. It is "good and bad" in that order: it starts out good but can end up bad (Abarbanel). **You must not eat of it.** Seeing it and touching it would be good

NJPS [18]The LORD God said, "It is not good for man to be alone; I will make a fitting helper for him." [19]And the LORD God formed out of the

OJPS [18]And the LORD God said: "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a help meet for him." [19]And out of the ground

18 וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים לֹא־טוֹב הֱיוֹת
הָאָדָם לְבַדּוֹ אֶעֱשֶׂה־לּוֹ עֵזֶר כְּנֶגְדּוֹ׃
19 וַיִּצֶר יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים מִן־הָאֲדָמָה כָּל־

RASHI **18 It is not good for man to be alone.** So that no one would think there are two powers, the Holy One (with no partner) in the upper realm and this one (with no partner) in the lower realm. **A fitting helper for him.** If he is lucky, he gets a fitting one; if not, he gets a fighting one.

19 The LORD God formed out of the earth all the wild beasts and all the birds

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ "It is not good for man to be alone" (v. 18), but who says he would be? We have already been told, "male and female He created them" (1:27)! ✦ How can God call the female "a fitting helper," as if females were merely "helpful" and not absolutely necessary for the propagation of the species?

RASHBAM have killed him? That is why they were expelled from the garden. "I told you for your own good not to eat of it!" But now "By the sweat of your brow shall you get bread to eat" (3:19)—that was the punishment.

IBN EZRA he was created. Still others understand not that the man would "die" on that day, but that he would be liable to the death penalty, or that he would merely be punished in *some* fashion (as in 2 Sam. 12:5). **[C]** I think God is saying, "On that day you will *begin* to die"—you will have attained your full strength and will then begin to decline. **[D]** Or perhaps it is simply, as tradition says, that the man repented of his sin. As the Holy One told Jeremiah, "At one moment I may decree that a nation or a kingdom shall be uprooted and pulled down and destroyed; but if that nation against which I made the decree turns back from its wickedness, I change My mind concerning the punishment I planned to bring on it" (Jer. 18:7–8).

18 It is not good for man to be alone. OJPS translates more literally, but NJPS has the sense: it is not good *for man*. God said this to Himself, or to the angels. **A fitting helper.** "Two are better off than one" (Eccles. 4:9). But see also "two can stand up *against him*" (Eccles. 4:12), which uses the language of our verse. For man and woman are opposites.

19 And the LORD God formed out of the earth all the wild beasts and all the birds of the sky. In 1:20 we were told that

[C] David says there that the man who stole a lamb "is a dead man," but he continues in v. 6, "He shall pay for the lamb four times over." **[D]** This is from the long commentary; in the short commentary Ibn Ezra says merely, "They bring proof from the child," a comment that has never been convincingly explained.

KIMHI lasts 1,000 of our years, and Adam died at the age of 930, **[N]** leaving 70 years for the lifespan of his descendants in future generations: "the span of our life is seventy years" (Ps. 90:10). **You shall die.** Rather, "your death will be decreed to come sooner than would otherwise be appropriate for you."

18 The LORD God said. To Himself. But perhaps it means that He spoke and Adam heard; this would explain why Adam expected to find a "fitting helper" (v. 20) among the other creatures. When God "speaks" in such a way that people can hear, this implies the miraculous creation of a physical, human voice that propagates through the air for that moment. Or perhaps He "said" it by means of the greater intelligence that He gave to human beings than to the lower animals. **It is not good for man to be alone.** Without a companion. He has no companion among the animals or birds, who are not at his level of creation. **I will make a fitting helper for him.** Obviously if he is to reproduce the species he cannot do it by himself without another member of his own species. As for calling her a "fitting" helper, the midrash is well known. **[O]** Unlike the other animals, where male and female were created simultaneously and equal, man was created alone; the human male was given dominion over the female, to rule her as he wanted. After all, she was originally one of his limbs. Just as a man's limbs obey his direction, so must a woman obey a man when he wishes. Since man was the peak of creation, and woman (created later) was at a lower level and was fashioned from a part of him, men are more capable than women. Intelligence too is stronger in them than in women.

19 The LORD God formed out of the earth all the wild beasts. He *had* formed

[N] See 5:5. **[O]** See Rashi's comment.

NAHMANIDES only those of little faith, who believe that creation is the inevitable result of natural law, think that being of compound nature implies impermanence. Believers, who think that the world was created by the will of a "simple" (i.e., noncomposite) God, understand that it will continue to exist as long as that will exists, and this is clearly true. So "as soon as you eat of it, you shall die" means "when you eat of it, your continued existence will no longer be My will." Eating in general, therefore, was originally simply for pleasure. Perhaps, though, the fruit of the garden of Eden did keep those who ate it alive, but (like manna) was completely digestible, leaving no waste to be excreted. In that case, the change in diet with which they were punished in 3:18–19 would have created the condition of "dust you are, and to dust you shall return" (3:19).

18 It is not good for man to be alone. Obviously man was not created to be unique in the world and not reproduce. All the animals were created male and female, and even the plants were given the means to reproduce. Perhaps it would be correct to follow the opinion that man was originally created as a double organism, capable of reproducing—no need here to get into the dispute about how this actually happens even today **[E]** —in such a way that one half of the organism helped the other half reproduce. **I will make a fitting helper for him.** Now the Holy One realized that it would be good if the helper could be "facing" him (as the Hebrew word really means), so that he could separate from it or couple with it at will. Note yet again that, as I explained in my comment to 1:4, "not good" in the creation story means "not permanent."

19 Whatever the man called each living creature, that would be its name. On this difficult Hebrew phrase, see the comments of

[E] See Nahmanides' comment to "a woman at childbirth" (Lev. 12:2).

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS enough to prompt reproduction, but eating it would let things get out of control, just as there are certain medicines that are meant to be smelled but not swallowed. So "you must not eat of it" is not a command, but a warning (Abarbanel). **As soon as you eat of it, you shall die.** He had not yet eaten from the tree of life; all told, they only spent three hours in the garden. If you think he did eat of it, you must assume that the two trees were antidotes to each other (Hizkuni). Your achievement of comprehension will cease (Gersonides).

18 I will make a fitting helper for him. A partner, but not for reproduction; as long as they were not condemned to death, they had no need of replacements (Bekhor Shor). A "helper" would imply another of just the same kind, as a doctor can help another doctor or a tailor another tailor. But a "fitting helper" implies someone complementary (Abarbanel). Literally, an "opposite" helper, the image coming from a set of scales, which rest precisely opposite each other when they are in balance (Sforno).

19 Whatever the man called each living creature, that would be its name. Rather, "that was its [proper] name," the name the

NJPS earth all the wild beasts and all the birds of the sky, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that would be its name. 20And the man gave names to all the cattle and to the birds of the sky and to all the wild beasts;

OJPS the LORD God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto the man to see what he would call them; and whatsoever the man would call every living creature, that was to be the name thereof. 20And the man gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the

חַיַּ֣ת הַשָּׂדֶ֗ה וְאֵת֙ כָּל־עֹ֣וף הַשָּׁמַ֔יִם וַיָּבֵ֖א
אֶל־הָאָדָ֑ם לִרְאֹ֣ות מַה־יִּקְרָ֣א־לֹ֔ו וְכֹ֣ל
אֲשֶׁ֤ר יִקְרָא־לֹו֙ הָאָדָ֔ם נֶ֥פֶשׁ חַיָּ֖ה הִ֥וא
שְׁמֹֽו׃ 20 וַיִּקְרָ֨א הָאָדָ֜ם שֵׁמֹ֗ות לְכָל־
הַבְּהֵמָה֙ וּלְעֹ֣וף הַשָּׁמַ֔יִם וּלְכֹ֖ל חַיַּ֣ת

RASHI **of the sky.** This forming is the "making" described in 1:25. But here we learn that the birds were created out of silt. We might have thought from 1:20 that they were created purely out of water; here it says that they were created out of earth as well. **And brought them to the man to see what he would call them.** You also learn from this verse that they were brought to the man immediately, on the very day they were made. But the midrash relates the verb "formed" here to a similar-sounding word in Deut. 20:19, "When in your war against a city you have to *besiege* it," implying that He "subjugated" them to the man. **Whatever the man called each living creature, that would be its name.** The Hebrew syntax is difficult; what it really means is that each living creature the man named, the name he gave it *would* be its name—forever.

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why is the creation of "all the wild beasts and all the birds of the sky" (v. 19) repeated here, and what does it have to do with the creation of the woman? ✦ If the point was to see "whatever the man called each living creature, that would be its name," wouldn't that apply not only to the animal realm but also to plants, minerals, metals, and so forth? ✦ Weren't these names really given to each species, not to each individual "living creature"? ✦ Shouldn't the assertion of v. 19 come only after "the man gave names" of v. 20? ✦ How exactly could one expect to find among "the cattle and the birds of the sky and the wild beasts" a female who would be a "fitting helper" for the man?

IBN EZRA birds were formed from the water, here from the earth; in fact, they were formed from both. **To see what he would call them.** For the angels to see. **Whatever the man called each living creature.** Literally, "whatever the man called it, each living creature." The expression clarifies the referent of the pronoun. (See again Exod. 2:6 and the many other examples of this phenomenon.)

20 To all the cattle and to the birds of the sky. "All" applies to the birds as well. See "though few be his numbers" (Deut. 33:6) for another example of this kind of carryover. (There are many others.) **All the wild beasts.** "Cattle" are the herbivores, "wild beasts" the carnivores. **But for Adam no fitting helper was found.** Rather, "for Adam he did not find a fitting helper," that is, he did not find one for himself. In Hebrew one sometimes refers to oneself in the third person, as Samuel did when he wrote,

20 But for Adam no fitting helper was found. When the Lord God brought the animals to Adam, he brought them in pairs, a male and a female of each species. Adam

KIMHI them, before He formed the man. **And all the birds of the sky.** In 1:20 we were told they were formed from water; they actually were formed from both, from the waters near the shore. Here, earth (*adamah*) is mentioned, since they are being brought to "the earthling" (*ha-adam*). Fish, which cannot walk on land and would die if they left the water, could not be brought before him in any natural way. Their names are given to them by fishermen, and so they vary from place to place. **And brought them to the man.** As slaves pass before their master. This was God's way of letting him know that he was to "rule" them (1:28). **To see what he would call them.** Using the greater wisdom God had given him to label them according to their essential natures, so that future generations would be able "to see" his wisdom when they used the names that would be passed down from father to son. Notice that He brought them to him before the woman was made. That way, he would notice that there were males and females of each kind but no female of his own kind, and would understand that God had done this for his own benefit, out of respect for him. **Whatever the man called each living creature, that would be its name.** That would be the name best fitting its nature. He gave them their names in Hebrew, which was the language he himself spoke, along with all other human beings until the time of the Tower of Babel. That is also the language in which God spoke with him. Calling him *adam*—which is obviously derived from the *adamah* from which he was created—proves this conclusively. See also Eve's name in 3:20, Cain's in 4:1, and Noah's in 5:29; and notice that Adam and Eve retain their original Hebrew names in all the other languages that were eventually created.

NAHMANIDES Rashi and Ibn Ezra. But perhaps it should really be explained with regard to the "helper." Remember that in v. 7 the man became "a living being" (despite the translations, the Hebrew there is the same as "living creature" of our verse). So our phrase could mean "if the man called any [of them] a 'living creature,' that would be its name"—and that creature would be his "helper." Well, he named them all, but he could not find one to call a "living creature" in the same sense that he himself was.

20 For Adam no fitting helper was found. Rashi explains it very well. The insertion of the naming into the "helper" story essentially demands this explanation. The commentators agree that the naming did actually happen as described here. The Holy One had to bring both of each species, male and female, to Adam, since we see that for some species he would give separate names to each (e.g., cow and bull). When he saw they were all in couples, he got depressed and fell asleep—at which point God deepened his sleep. But (as I said in my previous comment) I believe Adam was supposed to "name" his helper. Some say that Adam gave each of them the name that was appropriate to its nature, but even if we say that the names he gave them were contingent, he clearly was able to distinguish the various species and to see which of them was the fitting helper for which in terms of reproduction. He certainly found none of his own species, since they were all created according to their own nature. But if he had found one to his liking and chosen it, the Holy One would have altered its nature to fit him (as He eventually did with the rib of v. 21). That is the meaning of "whatever" in v. 19. But in my

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS Holy One wanted given to it. Had He given them the names themselves and told them to the man, he would have had a hard time remembering them (Hizkuni). When God was about to create man (according to Genesis Rabbah), He told the angels, "Man will be smarter than you." He brought all the animals before them, and they had no idea what to call them. But when He brought them before the man, he knew immediately the name that would best indicate the true nature of each of them (Gersonides). He did not name "each living creature" but merely each species (Abarbanel).

20 But for Adam no fitting helper was found. The animals were all helpful to him—that, after all, is what they were created for—but none of them was the helper he needed, one who would also possess intelligence (Gersonides). This was the point of the ostensible

NJPS but for Adam no fitting helper was found. 21So the LORD God cast a deep sleep upon the man; and, while he slept, He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh at that spot. 22And the LORD God fashioned the rib that He had taken from the man into a woman; and He brought her to the man. 23Then the man said,

הַשָּׂדֶה וּלְאָדָם לֹא־מָצָא עֵזֶר כְּנֶגְדּוֹ׃
21 וַיַּפֶּל יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים | תַּרְדֵּמָה עַל־הָאָדָם
וַיִּישָׁן וַיִּקַּח אַחַת מִצַּלְעֹתָיו וַיִּסְגֹּר בָּשָׂר
תַּחְתֶּנָּה׃ 22 וַיִּבֶן יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים | אֶת־
הַצֵּלָע אֲשֶׁר־לָקַח מִן־הָאָדָם לְאִשָּׁה
וַיְבִאֶהָ אֶל־הָאָדָם׃ 23 וַיֹּאמֶר הָאָדָם

OJPS field; but for Adam there was not found a help meet for him. 21And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the place with flesh instead thereof. 22And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from the man, made He a woman, and brought her unto the man. 23And the man said:

RASHI said, "Each of them has a partner—but I have none." Immediately "the LORD God cast a deep sleep upon the man" (v. 21).

21 While he slept. This was done while he slept so that Adam would not see the chunk of flesh that was cut off him and be disgusted because the woman was created from it. **He took one of his ribs.** Rather, "one of his sides," as the word is used in "the other *side* wall of the Tabernacle" (Exod. 26:20/36:25). This is what the Sages meant when they said that man was originally created double, with two faces. **At that spot.** The spot where He had cut him open.

22 The LORD God fashioned the rib that He had taken. Literally, He "built" it. He constructed her like a building, broad below and narrow above, to contain the fetus, just like a storehouse for wheat, which is broad below and narrow above so that the weight does not overburden the walls.

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why did God have to "cast a deep sleep" upon the man? Couldn't this have simply happened when the man fell asleep naturally? ✦ What is the meaning of the unusual "deep sleep" (one word in Hebrew) rather than the normal word for sleep? ✦ Why was the woman fashioned from a "rib" (v. 22) and not in the same way as the man, as the females of the other species were? This is extremely strange. ✦ Why was the woman "fashioned" rather than being "created" or "formed"? ✦ Scientifically, did the man live the rest of his life missing one of the ribs he should have had, or was he created—monstrously—with an extra, unnecessary rib?

IBN EZRA "the LORD sent Jerubbaal and Bedan and Jephthah and Samuel" (1 Sam. 12:11). I find it extremely implausible that our phrase could mean that He, the Holy One, did not find Adam a fitting helper.

21 A deep sleep. The Hebrew word refers to a state much deeper than mere "sleep," which in turn is deeper than "slumber." **[E]** Note that the ת of this word is a prefix; the root of the noun is רדם. **One of his ribs.** Rather, "one of his [two] sides"; see "for the other *side wall* of the Tabernacle" (Exod. 26:20, 36:25). **At that spot.** Once again, OJPS translates somewhat more literally but NJPS explains the meaning correctly.

22 He brought her to the man. When Adam first woke, he thought she had been brought to him just as all the other animals had. "He brought her" describes the event from Adam's perspective. The same thing happens in "the men pursued them in the direction of the Jordan" (Josh. 2:7)—they *thought* they were pursuing them, but really the people they were pursuing were hiding in Rahab's house. In our verse, the alternative is that she was fashioned outside the garden, in which case she would actually have to have been "brought" to the man. Anyway, when he saw her he realized that she had been cut from him, for one side of him, with her flesh, was missing, and he could feel that other flesh had replaced it.

[E] In the long commentary Ibn Ezra attributes this view to Moses Gikatilla and continues, "But 'sleep' is simply the most inclusive term."

KIMHI **21 While he slept.** The purpose of doing it while he slept was so that he would not feel any pain. Of course, God could have done this in such a way that Adam would feel no pain even when awake; but you must understand that God does not perform miracles when there is no need for them. (The "deep sleep" was not miraculous; people often naturally fall into this kind of sleep.) **While he slept.** Rather, "and he slept" (OJPS). After the "deep sleep" that prevented him from feeling the pain, "he slept" naturally and restfully until his pain was relieved. This may in fact have been the first sleep he ever got. According to our Sages, everything up to the birth of his children took place on the Friday of creation. **He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh at that spot.** No other created being was fashioned in this way. (See further my comment to "I will make a fitting helper for him" of v. 18.) The Sages disagree on whether God took one of the original human's two sides **[P]** or whether He simply took a "rib" as Onkelos and the English translations have it. Notice that this took place between the commandment and the sin. The commandment was given to the man, but he told the woman about it, and she (being aware that God had created them) accepted it upon herself.

22 And the LORD God fashioned the rib that He had taken from the man into a woman. Surrounding it with all the rest of the bones and the corresponding anatomical features, just like the man except female. **He brought her to the man.** After he had woken up.

[P] See the comments of Rashi and Ibn Ezra.

NAHMANIDES view the Holy One simply had no intention of taking the rib until Adam had convinced himself that no helper had yet been created for him and began to covet one. So in context our phrase really means, "No fitting helper was found who could be called by the name 'man.'" There is no need to resort (as some commentators do) to saying that Adam was referring to himself in the third person here. **[F]**

[F] See Ibn Ezra's comment.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS "naming," which is why he did not name the minerals, the plants, or any of the other created things. We learn, incidentally, that the Holy One implanted in man the ability to use language (Abarbanel).

21 A deep sleep. Symbolically representing the days of youth, when one's full intellectual powers are as yet asleep. But I should make clear—to "remove all obstacles from the road of My people," as Isa. 57:14 has it—that these two chapters, though there are some symbolic aspects to them, are also to be understood completely according to the straightforward sense (Abarbanel). So that he would not be frightened or feel pain (Sforno). **He took one of his ribs.** From what He took, He created a piece of flesh, covered it with skin, and caused it to grow and develop just as it would have in the womb—but all in a single instant (Gersonides).

NJPS "This one at last
Is bone of my bones
And flesh of my flesh.
This one shall be called Woman,
For from man was she taken."
[24]Hence a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, so that they become one flesh.

OJPS "This is now
bone of my bones,
and flesh of my flesh;
she shall be called Woman,
because she was taken out of Man."
[24]Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife, and they shall be one flesh.

זֹאת הַפַּעַם
עֶצֶם מֵעֲצָמַי
וּבָשָׂר מִבְּשָׂרִי
לְזֹאת יִקָּרֵא אִשָּׁה
כִּי מֵאִישׁ לֻקְחָה־זֹּאת׃
24 עַל־כֵּן יַעֲזָב־אִישׁ אֶת־אָבִיו וְאֶת־אִמּוֹ
וְדָבַק בְּאִשְׁתּוֹ וְהָיוּ לְבָשָׂר אֶחָד׃

RASHI **23 This one at last.** This teaches that Adam attempted to have sex with each of the animals that was brought to him, but got no satisfaction from any of them. **This one shall be called Woman, for from man was she taken.** The wordplay is in the original Hebrew; we learn from this that Hebrew was the original language of creation.

24 Hence a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife. This is the Holy Spirit speaking. The reason it is here is so that the commandments against sexual immorality apply to all the descendants of Noah. **So that they become one flesh.** The fetus is formed by both of them. That is where "they become one flesh."

KIMHI **23 This one shall be called Woman, for from man was she taken.** He could not call her *adamah* from *adam*, since she had not been created from *adamah* as he was but from one of his ribs. "Man" in this expression is not *adam* but *ish*, which can sometimes mean a male and sometimes, generically, a "person." It can even be used more generically than that, as when the prophet says of the stars, "Not a *man* of them fails to appear" (Isa. 40:26). But since woman was formed from man and he is her master, he can also lay claim to this word specifically, as when Gideon is called "man of Israel" (Judg. 7:14) or the Holy One is called a "man of war" (Exod. 15:3).

24 Hence a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife. In fact, these words are not Moses' but a continuation of Adam's in v. 23. He knew that he was to have children and perpetuate the species just like all the other living creatures. The straightforward sense of the verse is not that he abandons his parents, ceasing to serve and honor them to the best of his abilities, but simply that when he gets married he moves out of their

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why does the man say "this time" (as the Hebrew of v. 23 would naturally be translated)—as if there had been previous times—and not "this woman"? ✦ Why does the man say "This one shall be called Woman, for from man was she taken" using a completely different Hebrew word for man, one which he has not yet been called? ✦ Since the Hebrew words for woman and man here use a standard animal pattern (like lion/lioness, tiger/tigress, and so forth), what is the logic of saying the reason for the name is that she was "taken" from man? In Hebrew all the animals have such names, though none of the females was "taken" from the male in this fashion. (In fact many languages have such names; it is hard to understand how the Sages could claim that this detail proves Hebrew was the original language.) ✦ It might be appropriate in the case of Adam and Eve that "a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, so that they become one flesh" (v. 24), but why would this make sense for the men and women born every day in the natural way? In all subsequent generations, a child is "one flesh" with the parents, not the future spouse.

RASHBAM **23 This one at last.** Rather, "this time" only, woman comes forth from man; from now on, man will come forth from woman. **This one shall be called Woman.** The verb is masculine, matching "kind": "Just as I called each other kind of creature by its name, so too this kind of creature shall be called Woman."

IBN EZRA **23 This one at last.** Rather, "This *time* at last" I have found a help "meet" for me, like me—because she came from me. The whole story about Lilith **[F]** is just a midrash. **This one shall be called.** Rather, "on this account, she shall be called . . ." **Woman.** Note that the Hebrew word אשה is spelled with a *dagesh* in the ש, replacing the missing י of איש, "man." It is probably spelled this way to keep אשה ("woman") from getting mixed up with its homonym, אישה ("her husband"), which should have a *mappiq* in the ה but doesn't always. The plural *nashim* is related to the masculine *enosh* and *anashim*. **For from man was she taken.** Despite the *dagesh* missing from the ק, the verb is Pual—even though the root is not found in the matching Piel conjugation. **[G]**

24 They become one flesh. They become as if they were one flesh. Or perhaps it is that they resemble the "one flesh" they originally were. Some think they "become one flesh" in the offspring they produce, but this is implausible.

[F] Supposedly, a wife for Adam who preceded Eve. **[G]** Modern scholars take this word as the remnant of an ancient Qal Passive conjugation.

NAHMANIDES **23 This one at last.** This demonstrates clearly that he had been looking for a helper when the other creatures were brought to him. As for the deeper meaning of the word "this," I shall make that known in my comment to Deut. 33:1, if my Rock blesses me to reach that verse. **Is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.** And can properly be called by my name, for we can reproduce. **For from man was she taken.** The Hebrew again says "this" was taken, for the reason I alluded to in my first comment to the verse.

24 Hence a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, so that they become one flesh. Rashi's comment makes no sense to me. Male and female animals, too, "become one flesh." The difference is that the animals do not become emotionally close. The male has sex with whichever female he wants and then the two of them go their separate ways. But the fact that a human woman is "bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" (v. 23) to the man means that he forges an emotional closeness with her. This is how it was with Adam, and the trait was passed down to his descendants. See also "After all, he is our brother, our own flesh" (37:27) and "None of you shall come near anyone of his own flesh to uncover nakedness" (Lev. 18:6), where close relatives are called one's "flesh." The man sees that his wife is closer to him than his parents and family.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **23 This one at last.** This one time she is "bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh," but no future man's wife will be so (Sforno).

24 Hence a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife. The man left the earth, his mother, and the rain, his father, and clung to his wife. So would all their descendants do, in memory of the first man and the first woman (Abarbanel). "Hence"—because the Holy One so wanted her to resemble him that He made her from his body (Sforno). **So that they become one flesh.** Which is why they "were naked . . . yet they felt no shame," just as one feels no shame in being naked when one is alone. That is how close they were with each other (Abarbanel).

NJPS 25The two of them were naked, the man and his wife, 3 yet they felt no shame. 1Now the serpent was the shrewdest of all the wild beasts that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say: You shall not eat of any tree

OJPS 25And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and 3 were not ashamed. 1Now the serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman: "Yea, hath God said: Ye shall not eat of any

25 וַיִּהְיוּ שְׁנֵיהֶם עֲרוּמִּים הָאָדָם וְאִשְׁתּוֹ
וְלֹא יִתְבֹּשָׁשׁוּ׃ 1 וְהַנָּחָשׁ הָיָה עָרוּם
ג מִכֹּל חַיַּת הַשָּׂדֶה אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה יְהוָה
אֱלֹהִים וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל־הָאִשָּׁה אַף כִּי־אָמַר

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ If saying that "the two of them were naked, the man and his wife, yet they felt no shame" (v. 25) was meant to praise them, it is hard to see how; it demonstrates something they were lacking. But why would the text insult them, particularly at a stage when they had not yet sinned? ✦ Why say that "the serpent was the shrewdest of all the wild beasts" (v. 1)? The story clearly shows that he was shrewder than the human beings too! ✦ Why does the serpent begin with the word "Yea" (see OJPS), as if the conversation had already been going on? The Hebrew word means something more like "besides." ✦ How could a serpent—lacking an intelligent soul, and unable to speak—really entice the woman in this way? (Notice that the text has put him in the category of "wild beasts.") ✦ How did the serpent know God had given them a command about not eating? Where did he get these prophetic or divinatory powers? ✦ How did the woman understand the serpent's hissing? Or was he using sign language?

RASHI **25 They felt no shame.** They knew nothing of modesty, for they could not distinguish between good and bad. Even though they were given the intelligence to name the animals, they were not given the evil inclination until they ate from the tree. Then the evil inclination entered them and they realized the difference between good and evil.

3:1 The serpent was the shrewdest of all the wild beasts. It would be more natural for 2:25, "The two of them were naked," to be immediately followed by v. 21 below, "And the LORD God made garments of skins for Adam and his wife, and clothed them." So what is our verse doing here? It is teaching you what made the serpent spring his trap on them. The Hebrew word for "naked" in 2:25, *arum*, sounds the same as the word used here for "shrewd." He saw them naked and having sex out in the open, but he too was "naked" and he was seized with desire for her. But his shrewdness was his downfall as well. Here he is *arum mi-kol*, the shrewdest of all, but soon he would be *arur mi-kol*, "more cursed than all" (v. 14). **Did God really say: You shall not eat of any tree of the garden?"** He had seen them eating the fruit of the other trees. But he engaged her

IBN EZRA **25 Naked.** Compare "You exact pledges from your fellows without reason, and leave them *naked*, stripped of their clothes" (Job 22:6). Some say "the *shrewd* man saw trouble and took cover" (Prov. 22:3), using a Hebrew word that sounds and is spelled exactly the same, and actually is our same word. The sense would be the shrewd person's mind is "naked," uncovered—like a wide-open eye. **They felt no shame.** The Hebrew verb comes from a hollow root; in this form of the verb the second consonant is repeated. As the last word in the verse, the verb appears here in pausal form.

3:1 The serpent was the shrewdest of all the wild beasts. But not shrewder than the human beings. Note that the same Hebrew that meant "naked" in 2:25 means "shrewd" here. A "shrewd" person is one who can frame his words cleverly. Do not be surprised to see the same word used in two consecutive verses with two different meanings. This is a stylistic feature of fine writing. Compare "He had thirty sons, who rode on thirty *burros* and owned thirty *boroughs* in the region of Gilead" (Judg. 10:4) and "With the jaw of an *ass*, *mass* upon *mass*!" (Judg. 15:16). **He said.** Some say the woman was capable of understanding him because she knew the language of the animals. (This implies that "he said" is metaphoric: he "signaled" to her.) Others think this "serpent" was Satan. Have they forgotten v. 14? Or do they think Satan crawls on his belly and eats dirt? Not to mention v. 15—how exactly does one strike at Satan's head? According to Saadia, once we realize that no creature but man has intelligence and the ability to speak, we are forced to conclude that neither the serpent nor Balaam's ass **[H]** really spoke; an angel did the speaking for them. Samuel b. Hophni says it *did* speak, to which Solomon ibn Gabirol, the Spanish poet (who was also a great scholar), replies, "If the serpent could speak, why do they not speak nowadays?" (Scripture does not say anywhere that this ability was taken away.) Rightly, however, we must assume that these words have their straightforward meaning. The serpent spoke in language and walked upright; the One who gave intelligence to

[H] See Numbers 22 and Ibn Ezra's comment to v. 28 there.

KIMHI house and into a home with his wife. **So that they become one flesh.** That is, one body, as they had originally been, so that the species can be continued by the two of them. Our Sages understand this to have been said by Adam (prompted by the Holy Spirit) as the commandment prohibiting the Noahides from committing sexual immorality.

25 They felt no shame. They were not embarrassed to be seen naked, for they had never had sex; they had sexual organs but no desire to use them.

3:1 Now the serpent was the shrewdest of all the wild beasts that the LORD God had made. "Shrewd" and "naked" have the same vowel in the plural, but the מ of our word has no *dagesh* in the plural (see Job 5:12). They have different vowels in the singular. The snake was "shrewd," having the imaginative faculty possessed by an animal—not "intelligent," something only a human being can be. "Wild beasts" in general are "shrewder" in this way than the domesticated animals. Each beast has its own area of superiority, and shrewdness was the serpent's. **He said to the woman.** Not to the man. A woman is more air-headed and thus easier to dupe than a man. **Did God really say.** "Really" makes clear that there was a whole conversation, of which this is just the end. (For a similar example, see the Hebrew of Josh. 2:24.) Note that Ibn Ezra's explanation requires him to assume that the serpent says "God" and not "Lord God" because he did not know the Tetragrammaton; our "miracle" explanation would simply mean that God would not place that exalted name in the serpent's mouth, nor would the woman use it in conversation with an animal. **You shall not eat of any tree of the garden.** This was part of his shrewdness, trying to prompt her to be dissatisfied. He had not heard the woman say any such thing.

It is worth asking how this conversation took place. Was it miraculous, like Balaam's conversation with the ass? It certainly does not say here, "The Lord opened the serpent's mouth" (compare Num. 22:28). If, as Saadia thinks, it was really an angel speaking in both cases, what need would there be of a serpent, let alone one who was "shrewd"? Why would the angel not attempt to dupe the man, the one who was actually given the commandment?

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **3:1 The serpent was the shrewdest of all the wild beasts.** He must have eaten from the tree of knowledge by accident. The command not to do so, after all, had only been given to the man (Hizkuni). The serpent is metaphoric for the imaginative faculty. The imaginative faculty was shrewder than any of the other faculties that man shares with the animals (Gersonides). Satan—the evil inclination, the imagination—is here called a serpent, just as a king may be called a lion (Sforno). **He said to the woman.** Where was Adam? According to one opinion in Genesis Rabbah, he had sex with her and then went to sleep (Hizkuni). The serpent

NJPS of the garden?" 2The woman replied to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the other trees of the garden. 3It is only about fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden that God said: 'You shall not eat of it or touch it, lest you die.'" 4And the serpent said to the woman, "You are not going to die, 5but God knows that as soon as you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like divine beings who

אֱלֹהִים לֹא תֹאכְלוּ מִכֹּל עֵץ הַגָּן׃ 2 וַתֹּאמֶר הָאִשָּׁה אֶל־הַנָּחָשׁ מִפְּרִי עֵץ־ הַגָּן נֹאכֵל׃ 3 וּמִפְּרִי הָעֵץ אֲשֶׁר בְּתוֹךְ־הַגָּן אָמַר אֱלֹהִים לֹא תֹאכְלוּ מִמֶּנּוּ וְלֹא תִגְּעוּ בּוֹ פֶּן־תְּמֻתוּן׃ 4 וַיֹּאמֶר הַנָּחָשׁ אֶל־הָאִשָּׁה לֹא־מוֹת תְּמֻתוּן׃ 5 כִּי יֹדֵעַ אֱלֹהִים כִּי בְּיוֹם אֲכָלְכֶם מִמֶּנּוּ וְנִפְקְחוּ עֵינֵיכֶם

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Since God had said, "As soon as you eat of it, you shall die" (2:17), why did the woman believe the serpent when he said, "You are not going to die" (v. 4)? ✦ To whom was the serpent referring when he said, "you will be like divine beings" (v. 5)?

OJPS tree of the garden?" 2And the woman said unto the serpent: "Of the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; 3but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said: Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die." 4And the serpent said unto the woman: "Ye shall not surely die; 5for God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye

RASHI in conversation and worked the subject around to that particular tree.

3 Or touch it. By adding to the commandment, she ended up diminishing it. "Do not add to His words" (Prov. 30:6).

4 You are not going to die. He actually pushed her so that she touched the tree. Then he said to her, "You didn't die for touching the tree, and you are not going to die for eating from it."

5 God knows that as soon as you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like divine beings. People who are in the same line of work are all jealous of one another. "He must have eaten from this tree and known how to create the world. If you eat from it, you will be able to create worlds of your own."

IBN EZRA human beings gave it to him as well. If it was an angel speaking through the serpent's mouth, the serpent certainly committed no sin. And an angel who would make the serpent say such things was certainly no agent of the Holy One; an angel cannot rebel against God's orders. (As for those who ask how the serpent managed to find the woman—what a stupid question.) **Did God really say.** The serpent did not say "the LORD God," as the Holy One is called elsewhere in this story, because he did not know that name. **You shall not eat of any tree of the garden.** The Hebrew of this quotation begins with the word "moreover" ("yea" of OJPS). This shows us that these are not the serpent's first words. Instead, they are the conclusion of an argument *a fortiori*, not merely a question out of the blue.

3 You shall not eat of it or touch it, lest you die. The woman added the words "or touch it" to God's command. Manoah's wife did the same when she told her husband that the angel had said, "The boy is to be a nazirite to God from the womb *to the day of his death*" (Judg. 13:7).

5 You will be like divine beings. Not "as God" (OJPS), but like angels.

KIMHI The whole story is a quite confusing one—but the esoteric explanation of it is quite clear. The Sages also describe the serpent as injecting filth into Eve when he had sex with her; the Israelites were cleansed of this filth at Mount Sinai, but the other nations were not. All this is correct to one who understands it properly. But, in accordance with the rabbinic injunction, we will not reveal the esoteric meaning here, but will just record the allusions to it that they themselves gave us. One who understands will understand.

Some say the snake did not speak but signaled to the woman, who understood his gestures. But this is implausible. Even if she understood his gestures, how did he understand her answers? Ibn Ezra thinks the serpent actually spoke like a human being, but one must ask how the story of creation could fail to single out such a creature, as man was singled out? And when the snake's punishment is recorded, why is it not also cursed with the loss of its intelligence? We must conclude that the snake indeed spoke, but miraculously, in order for God to be able to test the woman. He was nevertheless punished because (as God knew) the serpent was jealous of the man.

3 It is only about fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden that God said: "You shall not eat of it or touch it." He told us this for our own good. He was trying to protect us from death. Its fruit must be poisonous. **Lest you die.** Rather, "in case" you die. Since the man was told he would definitely die if he *ate* of the tree, "in case" must refer to touching it (which she added on her own). "He was just trying to keep us safe." Alternatively, the word may mean not "in case" but an emphatic "not" (see 24:6 and 31:24). "You shall not eat of it or touch it. Do not die!"

4 You are not going to die. What you are saying is wrong. He is not stopping you from eating it out of love for you. He is trying to frighten you away from it. But what He really wants is to keep you from rising higher than He originally made you.

5 God knows that as soon as you eat of it your eyes will be opened. Metaphorically. **And you will be like divine beings.** That is, like angels. **Who know good and bad.** That is, sexual desire. The angels certainly know nothing about sex for themselves, but they do understand what it means for humans and animals. It might be, however, that the serpent knew nothing about it either, but simply repeated what he had heard from the woman earlier in their conversation. She does not say anything about it in v. 3, but what we have here is obviously not the beginning of their conversation.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS "said" nothing to the woman. We do not read that the Lord opened his mouth, or closed it later when he is cursed. Rather, watching the snake eat the fruit of this tree (which, according to 1:30, he was not supposed to eat) and not die, she reconstructed this conversation between them in her mind, as in "ask the beasts, and they will teach you" of Job 12:7. There are many similar verses, none of which mean that animals can speak; it is a metaphor for learning from their actions (Abarbanel).

3 Or touch it. For the purpose of eating it, as in Lev. 11:8, "You shall not eat of their flesh or touch their carcasses; they are unclean for you"; that is the straightforward sense (Hizkuni).

4 You are not going to die. Having pushed her so that she touched the tree, he convinced her that she had already committed a capital crime. "Now that you are condemned anyway, you're not going to die for eating it" (Hizkuni). The serpent's words in vv. 1 and 4 are really one continuous speech, represented in the text as if the woman interrupted it (as women are wont to do). They should be understood to say, "Even though God said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden, lest you die,' you are not going to die" (Abarbanel).

5 Like divine beings. See also only Zech. 12:8 and Ps. 77:14 (Masorah). **Who know good and bad.** Christian interpreters take this expression to mean that they would be like divine beings in the sense that they would know what was good and do it without having to be commanded (Abarbanel).

NJPS know good and bad." 6When the woman saw that the tree was good for eating and a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable as a source of wisdom, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave some to her husband, and he ate. 7Then the eyes of both of them were opened and they perceived that they were naked; and they sewed together fig leaves and made themselves loincloths.

OJPS shall be as God, knowing good and evil." 6And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat; and she gave also unto her husband with her, and he did eat. 7And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig-leaves together, and made themselves girdles.

וְהִיִּיתֶם כֵּאלֹהִים יֹדְעֵי טֹוב וָרָע׃ 6 וַתֵּרֶא
הָאִשָּׁה כִּי טוֹב הָעֵץ לְמַאֲכָל וְכִי תַאֲוָה־
הוּא לָעֵינַיִם וְנֶחְמָד הָעֵץ לְהַשְׂכִּיל וַתִּקַּח
מִפִּרְיוֹ וַתֹּאכַל וַתִּתֵּן גַּם־לְאִישָׁהּ עִמָּהּ
וַיֹּאכַל׃ 7 וַתִּפָּקַחְנָה עֵינֵי שְׁנֵיהֶם וַיֵּדְעוּ
כִּי עֵירֻמִּם הֵם וַיִּתְפְּרוּ עֲלֵה תְאֵנָה וַיַּעֲשׂוּ
לָהֶם חֲגֹרֹת׃

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ How could the woman know "that the tree was good for eating and a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable as a source of wisdom" (v. 6) if she had not yet eaten from it or even touched it? ✦ In what way exactly was the tree "desirable as a source of wisdom"? This is a complete mystery to me. ✦ Why are we told that "the eyes of both of them were opened and they perceived that they were naked" (v. 7), but not that "they felt shame," which was the only thing that really happened? They certainly already could see and understand that they were naked.

RASHI **6 The woman saw.** She "looked at" what the snake had said in v. 5—that is, considered it—and she liked it and believed him. **The tree was good for eating.** To "be like divine beings." **A delight to the eyes.** For "your eyes [to] be opened." **Desirable as a source of wisdom.** To "know good and bad." **She also gave some to her husband.** So that she would not die alone, leaving him alive to marry another woman. "Also" implies that she gave some of it to all the animals as well.

7 The eyes of both of them were opened. Not literally but metaphorically, as the rest of the verse demonstrates. **They perceived that they were naked.** Even someone who is blind knows when he is naked, so what is this telling us? They "realized" that, though they had been given just one commandment, they had stripped themselves of it. **Fig leaves.** This was the tree they had eaten from; they used the same

RASHBAM **3:7 Loincloths.** To cover their nakedness, just as "David was *girt* with a linen ephod" (2 Sam. 6:14). Our verse uses a noun from the same root to describe an article of clothing.

IBN EZRA **6 The woman saw.** That is, she realized. **That the tree was good for eating.** Not the tree itself, of course, but its fruit. **That the tree was desirable as a source of wisdom.** It was desirable if she wanted to have her eyes opened and become wise. **She took of its fruit.** Based on v. 7, many people think it was a fig tree. But if that was so, the verse would have stated plainly, "They sewed together leaves from the tree of knowledge." Plenty of others think what they ate was wheat. **[I]** But I think the two trees in this story existed only in the garden of Eden and not anywhere else in the world. The tree of knowledge engenders sexual desire, which is why they covered their nakedness. After the man ate from this tree, he "knew" his wife. The biblical idiom for sex comes from the name of this tree. At the same time as a boy begins to be able to know right from wrong, he also begins to feel sexual desire. **She also gave some to her husband.** The Hebrew adds "with her" (OJPS). They ate it together, for she had revealed to him the secret that the serpent had told her. The man did not eat it unwittingly, or he would not have been punished.

7 They sewed together fig leaves. Some loudmouths wonder where in this story we find a needle. Idiots! They were perfectly capable of using twigs to do this

[I] See B. Ber. 40a.

KIMHI **6 When the woman saw that the tree was good for eating and a delight to the eyes.** As stated in 2:9 of all the trees in the garden. She "saw" it in her heart, that is, realized: "So we certainly will not die if we eat of it!" **And that the tree was desirable as a source of wisdom.** She therefore believed what the serpent said about this too. **She took of its fruit and ate. She also gave some to her husband, and he ate.** He was somewhere else in the garden. After she had eaten some, she took him some of the fruit too, told him what the serpent had said, and they ate it together. That is why the Hebrew literally says that she gave it to her husband "with her" (OJPS). So she ate of it twice and he ate of it once. Understand this. The tradition that "also" implies that she gave some to the animals and the birds demands careful consideration.

7 Then the eyes of both of them were opened and they perceived. Their eyes were "opened" metaphorically. That is why it continues "and they knew" (OJPS) rather than "and they saw." Obviously they looked exactly the same as they previously had. But once they ate the fruit, sexual desire was born in them and their sexual parts stiffened with lust. This is what embarrassed them—part of their body left their control. But it was measure for measure; they had left God's control, His commandment. Also, sex is indecent

NAHMANIDES **3:6 That the tree was good for eating.** She had thought that it was bitter and poisonous, and that that was why He had warned them not to eat it. But now she saw that it was actually sweet and good. **And a delight to the eyes.** Rather, "a *craving* for the eyes." By means of it, one could feel desire and follow one's cravings. **And that the tree was desirable as a source of wisdom.** Once again, what she saw was that the tree could give one the wisdom to *have* desire. According to this phrasing, it is the eyes that crave and the mind that desires. The bottom line is that the tree could give one the power to want a thing or its opposite.

7 The eyes of both of them were opened. This is speaking of wisdom, not literally about vision, as Rashi points out. "Open my eyes, that I may perceive the wonders of Your teaching" (Ps. 119:18).

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **6 When the woman saw that the tree was good for eating.** After talking with the serpent, she began to look it over and saw that it looked good and smelled nice, so it was definitely not poisonous after all (Bekhor Shor). It enables comprehension to take place with remarkable ease, which is not so for the human methods of understanding truth and falsehood (Gersonides). This clearly proves my interpretation is correct. The serpent did not tell her the tree was good; she thought about it and realized it on her own. This story is a good lesson to those who philosophize about the commandments and subject them to rational analysis (Abarbanel). **She also gave some to her husband.** "Also" includes Cain and his twin sister, who had already been born, as well (Hizkuni). Men are easily enticed by women; see 1 Kings 11:4, where Solomon's hundreds of wives "turned his heart after other gods" (Gersonides). As the Hebrew literally says, she gave it to her husband "with her" (OJPS)—so that he would be with her (Sforno).

7 They perceived that they were naked. It is not as if they were blind before; but they "perceived" what the Holy One showed them: how many generations perished because of them (Hizkuni). So were all the other animals; but it was more evident in the case of the

NJPS 8They heard the sound of the LORD God moving about in the garden at the breezy time of day; and the man and his wife hid from the LORD God among the trees

OJPS 8And they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden toward the cool of the day; and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the

8 וַיִּשְׁמְעוּ֙ אֶת־קוֹל֙ יְהוָ֣ה אֱלֹהִ֔ים מִתְהַלֵּ֖ךְ
בַּגָּ֑ן לְר֣וּחַ הַיּ֔וֹם וַיִּתְחַבֵּ֞א הָאָדָ֧ם וְאִשְׁתּ֛וֹ
מִפְּנֵ֥י יְהוָ֖ה אֱלֹהִ֑ים בְּתוֹךְ֙ עֵ֣ץ הַגָּֽן׃

RASHI tree that caused their downfall to set things right. Anyway, the other trees had prevented them from using their leaves. Why doesn't the text itself tell us which tree they ate from? According to the Tanhuma, the Holy One did not wish one of His creations to be taunted for this. People might scoff at it, "This is the tree through which the world was stricken."

8 They heard the sound of the LORD God moving about in the garden. There are many midrashim about this, but our Sages have already set them in place in Genesis Rabbah and the other midrash collections. My own purpose is to explain the straightforward sense of the text, using only those details from traditional lore that are most fit to resolve difficulties in the flow of the story. **[K]** Here, the straightforward sense is simply that they heard the Holy One moving about the garden. **At the breezy time of day.** More literally, "in the direction of the day," that is, the direction where the sun sets, where it is toward the close of the day, in the evening: the west. For they sinned late in the afternoon, in the 10th hour. **[L]**

[K] Rashi's Hebrew alludes to Prov. 25:11, "Like golden apples in silver showpieces is *a phrase well turned*" in the NJPS translation. **[L]** Between 3:00 and 4:00 p.m.

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why did the man (and his wife) hide from God (v. 8)? Didn't they understand (as the Psalmist says), "Where can I escape from Your spirit? Where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend to heaven, You are there; if I descend to Sheol, You are there too" (Ps. 139:7–8)? ✦ Why bother to hide if (as happens in v. 10) you are going to respond as soon as God asks for you?

KIMHI and repulsive, though it is necessary to perpetuate the species. That is why they were ashamed in front of each other—not to mention God, from whom they hid. **They sewed together fig leaves.** Which are quite wide. They sewed enough of them together to be able to cover their nakedness. Some of the Sages say that this was the tree they ate from; others, that they ate wheat or citron. But R. Judah b. Simon says in the name of R. Joshua b. Levi, "God forbid! The Holy One has never revealed to anyone what tree it was, and He never will."

RASHBAM **8 They heard the sound of the LORD God moving about in the garden at the breezy time of day.** That is, "they heard the sound [while *they* were] moving about in the garden," walking in a clearing, outside the trees. Notice that, when they hear the sound, they will leave the place where they are walking and hide "among the trees." That is the straightforward sense of the text.

IBN EZRA sewing—which also carries its normal meaning, as in "I sewed sackcloth over my skin" (Job 16:15).

8 They heard the sound of the LORD God moving about in the garden. NJPS translates correctly. We do indeed find a sound "moving" in such verses as "The sound thereof shall *go* like the serpent's" (Jer. 46:22) and "The blare of the horn *went* louder and louder" (Exod. 19:19). Jonah ibn Janah thinks it was the man who was "moving about"—but his opinion about 2:17 shows you how he thinks. And remember that both of them "heard" the sound. **At the breezy time of day.** Toward evening, when the breeze blows.

8 They heard the sound of the LORD God moving about in the garden at the breezy time of day. The breeze carried the sound to them. They realized that the sound was from the Holy One, coming to speak with them about their sin, and they were ashamed and (being naked) were embarrassed and hid. True, they had made themselves loincloths, but these did not cover them very well. Obviously they understood that one cannot hide from the Holy One, but their very human embarrassment made them hide anyway. He had caused the sound in the first place so that they would hide among the trees while He was speaking with them. The Torah is also teaching good behavior. It is not nice to just walk in on someone; one first makes a noise or knocks on the door, in case the person is doing something private. **The man and his wife hid.** They were embarrassed both at their nakedness and at having violated God's command. **Among the trees of the garden.** "Tree" is singular in Hebrew, but is being used as a collective noun.

NAHMANIDES **8 They heard the sound of the LORD God moving about in the garden.** Genesis Rabbah understands this phrase to mean that the sound was moving about, as do Maimonides in the *Guide* and Ibn Ezra (and see the rest of his comment). But in my opinion "When the LORD had finished speaking to Abraham, He *went* His way" (18:33), "I will *walk* among you" (Lev. 26:12), and "I will *return* to My abode" (Hosea 5:15) are the relevant verses here, referring to an appearance of the Shekhinah in that locale or its departure from the place in which it had appeared. **At the breezy time of day.** Rather, "in accordance with the day's wind." When the Shekhinah appears, a mighty wind comes with it: "And lo, the LORD passed by. There was a great and mighty wind, splitting mountains and shattering rocks by the power of the LORD" (1 Kings 19:11); "He mounted a cherub and flew, gliding on the wings of the wind" (Ps. 18:11); "The LORD replied to Job out of the tempest" (Job 38:1). So what our verse means is that the Shekhinah appeared in the garden and that they realized this when the wind began to blow toward them. But here it is "the *breath* of the LORD [that] blows on them" (Isa. 40:7)—not the "mighty wind" of other prophecies, but an ordinary, everyday wind, so that they should not panic. (They hid, nonetheless, because they were naked.) In Genesis Rabbah, R. Abba b. Kahana points out that the "moving about" verb implies just this kind of gradual movement, as I have explained; but he interprets it to refer to the *departure* of the Shekhinah because of their sin, as in the Hosea verse. But we interpret it as the appearance of the Shekhinah, which is the more correct and more sensible explanation in this verse.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS man and the woman because they stood upright and were not covered with wool or hair or feathers (Abarbanel). **They sewed together fig leaves and made themselves loincloths.** Then they went to a "breezy" location (where the Lord God looks for them in v. 8), one where the trees did not interfere with the breeze—like thieves leaving the scene of the crime: "I wasn't even there!" (Bekhor Shor).

8 At the breezy time of day. Rather, "with an everyday wind." The Holy One did not want to give them the opportunity to say that they had hidden because the wind was so strong (Hizkuni). The man received the divine communication (of which, having sinned, he was no longer worthy) because (1) he was still "moving about" in the garden—the perfect place for it—and (2) the "spirit of the day," as our phrase literally says—the spirit that had communicated with him many times that day already—still enabled him to receive prophecy (Abarbanel).

NJPS of the garden. 9The LORD God called out to the man and said to him, "Where are you?" 10He replied, "I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid." 11Then He asked, "Who told you that you were naked? Did you eat of the tree from which I had forbidden you to eat?" 12The man said, "The woman You put at my side—she gave me of the tree, and I ate." 13And the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this you have done!" The woman replied, "The

9 וַיִּקְרָ֥א יְהוָ֖ה אֱלֹהִ֑ים אֶל־הָאָדָ֖ם וַיֹּ֥אמֶר
לֹּ֖ו אַיֶּֽכָּה׃ 10 וַיֹּ֖אמֶר אֶת־קֹלְךָ֥ שָׁמַ֛עְתִּי בַּגָּ֑ן
וָאִירָ֖א כִּֽי־עֵירֹ֥ם אָנֹ֛כִי וָאֵחָבֵֽא׃ 11 וַיֹּ֕אמֶר
מִ֥י הִגִּ֖יד לְךָ֣ כִּֽי עֵירֹ֑ם הֲמִן־הָעֵ֗ץ
אֲשֶׁ֨ר צִוִּיתִ֜יךָ לְבִלְתִּ֤י אֲכָל־מִמֶּ֙נּוּ֙ אָכָ֔לְתָּ׃
12 וַיֹּ֣אמֶר הָאָדָ֔ם הָאִשָּׁ֕ה אֲשֶׁר֙ נָתַ֣תָּה
עִמָּדִ֔י הִ֥וא נָתְנָה־לִּ֖י מִן־הָעֵ֑ץ וָאֹכֵֽל׃
13 וַיֹּ֤אמֶר יְהוָה֙ אֱלֹהִ֔ים לָאִשָּׁ֖ה מַה־זֹּ֣את
עָשִׂ֑ית וַתֹּ֣אמֶר הָאִשָּׁ֗ה הַנָּחָשׁ֙ הִשִּׁיאַ֣נִי

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why does the man not respond to God's question, "Where are you?" (v. 9) appropriately: "Here I am"? ✦ Why does the man say "I was afraid" rather than "I was ashamed"? ✦ How can he say he is naked when they had already "made themselves loincloths" (v. 7) before they hid? ✦ What was the point of hiding, anyway? They had been naked all along—and the other animals all still were. ✦ Why did God not say anything to the man about these strange responses of his? ✦ Why did God say, "Who told you that you were naked?" (v. 11)?—as if anyone needed to be told this. It is an absurd question. It makes it sound as if God did not want them to know they were naked. ✦ Why did God not say to the serpent, "What is this you have done!" as He did to the man and his wife?

RASHI **9 Where are you?** He knew where he was. This was to engage him in conversation, to keep him from panicking, which is what would have happened had He immediately accused him. He did the same with Cain, asking him, "Where is your brother Abel?" (4:9), and also with Balaam, "What do these people want of you?" (Num. 22:9). The point was to get them talking. Isaiah did the same to King Hezekiah after he had showed the envoys of King Berodach-baladan all around his treasure house. **[M]**

11 Who told you that you were naked? How could you know that it is shameful to be naked?

12 The woman You put at my side. He was not grateful for what God had done for him.

13 The serpent duped me. For the verb, compare "Now then, do not let Hezekiah *delude* you" (2 Chron. 32:15).

[M] See 2 Kings 20.

OJPS garden. 9And the LORD God called unto the man, and said unto him: "Where art thou?" 10And he said: "I heard Thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself." 11And He said: "Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat?" 12And the man said: "The woman whom Thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat." 13And the LORD God said unto the woman: "What is this thou hast done?" And the woman said: "The serpent

IBN EZRA **9 Where are you?** This was simply a conversation starter, like "Where is your brother Abel?" (4:9). When Cain lied in reply, the Holy One made clear that He knew the answer to the question.

12 The woman You put. Literally, "whom You gave." It was Your fault! You gave me the one who gave it to me. **At my side.** The Hebrew does not say "at my side," but "with me" (OJPS) in the garden. (This unusual form of the preposition is used only with the first person singular.)

13 Duped me. Rather, "enticed me." **And I ate.** The vowel under the ו shows that this is not a present tense but a converted imperfect. (The א is that of the first person singular; the א of the root disappears in this form.)

KIMHI **9 Where are you?** This was a rhetorical question, like "What is that in your hand?" (Exod. 4:2).

11 Did you eat of the tree from which I had forbidden you to eat? The Holy One asked this in order to hear the answer.

12 The woman You put at my side. It was Your fault. You gave me this kind of woman.

13 The serpent duped me. True, I duped my husband, but the serpent duped me—and You created him.

NAHMANIDES **12 The woman You put at my side.** She was the "fitting helper" You gave me, so I assumed that anything she told me would be helpful and beneficial. — But as v. 17 makes clear, that is exactly what he is being punished for. "You should not have violated My commandment just because she advised you to." And Genesis Rabbah accuses Adam of ingratitude for saying this.

13 What is this you have done! Violating My commandment! — In which she too had of course been included, since she was "bone of his bone" at the time it was given. But notice that she is not admonished specifically for eating the fruit, since she also told the man to eat. This was the sin committed by the serpent, which was far worse. **[G]** From this you can learn the punishment for causing

[G] The text of Nahmanides' comment is confused here; some take him to be saying that eating was the greater sin.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **9 The LORD God called out to the man.** The Torah teaches us a wonderful lesson about governance by telling the story in this way. God did not judge Adam and Eve without confronting them face to face to see whether they had an explanation for their behavior. The same applies to human interaction; following this rule would alleviate many of the conflicts that happen between people. But with regard to the allegorical side of the story, God had to call out to the man because He found that he was not ready to receive the divine emanation (Gersonides). **Where are you?** You are hiding, which you never did before (Sforno).

10 I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid. He was afraid of being asked why he hid, so he prepared this answer in advance. But God replied, "I have come to you plenty of times before, and it never bothered you that you were naked" (Bekhor Shor). Even though they had made themselves loincloths, evidently these covered nothing but their genitals (Hizkuni). I did not hide because of any sin I may or may not have committed, but because I was naked and thought it would be more decent to hide (Abarbanel). As when the Israelites, after their sin, "shrank from coming near" Moses; see Exod. 34:30 (Sforno).

11 Who told you that you were naked? No one calls an animal "naked," because animals don't wear clothes. Yet people, even if they are dressed, but in rags, call themselves naked. Who told you you were supposed to wear clothes? (Bekhor Shor).

12 The woman You put at my side—she gave me of the tree, and I ate. This is the way of thieves—when they are caught, they start to rat on each other (Bekhor Shor). She gave me a fruit from some tree or other—I had no idea which one. Besides, you gave her to me as a "fitting helper" (2:18); I had no idea I needed to be suspicious of her (Hizkuni). Saying "You gave me the one who gave it to me" gave his explanation a certain literary quality (Abarbanel). He should have repented and said, as David said to Nathan in 2 Sam. 12:13, "I stand guilty!" (Sforno).

13 What is this you have done! Here too He was giving her an opportunity to repent. As Ezek. 18:23 puts it, "Is it my desire that a wicked person shall die?—says the Lord GOD. It is rather that he shall turn back from his ways and live" (Sforno).

NJPS serpent duped me, and I ate." [14]Then the LORD God said to the serpent,

"Because you did this,
More cursed shall you be
Than all cattle
And all the wild beasts:
On your belly shall you crawl
And dirt shall you eat
All the days of your life.
[15]I will put enmity
Between you and the woman,
And between your offspring and hers;
They shall strike at your head,
And you shall strike at their heel."

וְאֹכֵל׃ 14 וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים | אֶל־הַנָּחָשׁ
כִּי עָשִׂיתָ זֹּאת
אָרוּר אַתָּה
מִכָּל־הַבְּהֵמָה
וּמִכֹּל חַיַּת הַשָּׂדֶה
עַל־גְּחֹנְךָ תֵלֵךְ
וְעָפָר תֹּאכַל
כָּל־יְמֵי חַיֶּיךָ׃
15 וְאֵיבָה | אָשִׁית
בֵּינְךָ וּבֵין הָאִשָּׁה
וּבֵין זַרְעֲךָ וּבֵין זַרְעָהּ
הוּא יְשׁוּפְךָ רֹאשׁ
וְאַתָּה תְּשׁוּפֶנּוּ עָקֵב׃ ס

OJPS beguiled me, and I did eat." [14]And the LORD God said unto the serpent:

"Because thou hast done this,
cursed art thou from among
all cattle,
and from among all beasts of the field;
upon thy belly shalt thou go,
and dust shalt thou eat
all the days of thy life.
[15]And I will put enmity
between thee and the woman,
and between thy seed and her seed;
they shall bruise thy head,
and thou shalt bruise their heel."

RASHI **14 Because you did this.** From the fact that God did not ask the serpent any questions, we derive that one does not inquire into the motives of someone who entices. Had He asked him, "Why did you do this?" the serpent could have responded, "Does one follow the words of the master, or of the student?" **[N] Than all cattle and all the wild beasts.** The Sages demonstrate in a midrash that the reason for citing both "cattle" and "wild beasts" here is that serpents are cursed to carry their young for seven years. (The arithmetic is worked out on B. Bek. 8a.) **On your belly shall you crawl.** He had had legs, but they were cut off.

15 I will put enmity between you and the woman. Your intent was to have Adam eat the fruit first and die so that you could have Eve. The only reason you spoke to Eve first is because women are easily persuaded and easily persuade their husbands. Since it was the woman that you wanted, "I will put enmity between you and the woman." **Strike.** Rather, "crush." See Deut. 9:21, where

[N] "They should have listened to You, not to me."

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ How could God "curse" the serpent, "On your belly shall you crawl and dirt shall you eat all the days of your life" (v. 14), when these are part of the serpent's nature to begin with? Is it a "punishment" to fish that they don't have any feet? Even the "enmity" (v. 15) between serpents and humans, and the interaction of their heads and our heels, is not a curse, but a natural phenomenon. ✦ If the serpent could originally speak, why isn't the curse of removing this ability mentioned?

RASHBAM **14 On your belly shall you crawl and dirt shall you eat.** Since he is crawling on his belly, the dirt will enter his mouth whether he wants it to or not.

IBN EZRA **14 More cursed shall you be than all cattle and all the wild beasts.** In that his lifespan was shortened. But correctly it refers to his losing the ability to walk. **Your belly.** Your chest. It is not clear whether the ך of this word is part of the root or is simply an ending; see similarly Gihon and Pishon of 2:11 and 13. The idea that the snake's "belly" is referred to this way because he breaks wind (which implies the ך is a suffix) is a midrash. Many people have been confused enough to inquire why the serpent was cursed. Did he have intelligence and free will? Had he been commanded not to tempt the woman? But see my comment to "He said" of v. 1.

15 I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers. You tried to do her wrong; her offspring will take revenge on you. **They shall strike at your head.** If a snake is not struck in the head, it does not die. "At" is

KIMHI **14 Because you did this.** The serpent had no response and no excuse. Even though the excuses of the man and the woman were weak, they at least had something to say in their own defense. The serpent did not, so he was cursed immediately. God did not bother to ask him for a response. He had caused the woman to violate God's command, and it did not benefit himself in the least: "Though the serpent bite with all his might, he gets no profit off it" (Eccles. 10:11). The potential response the Sages put in his mouth **[Q]** merely blames the humans for their sin. It does nothing to excuse him for his. **More cursed shall you be.** Notice that the serpent's curse comes first, since he was the cause of it all. **And dirt shall you eat.** Having caused the humans to sin through eating. **All the days of your life.** As long as that species continues to live. Even (following the similar interpretation in the Passover haggadah of "*all* the days of your life") in messianic times. Even when "the wolf and the lamb shall graze together, and the lion shall eat straw like the ox," still "the serpent's food shall be earth" (Isa. 65:25).

15 I will put enmity between you and the woman. Replacing the love you had for her, which caused you to do this. I will change the love to hate. **And between your offspring and hers.** But not for "all the days of your life"; this will not continue in messianic times. Then,

[Q] See Rashi's comment.

NAHMANIDES someone to sin, which (as our Sages have taught us) derives from "You shall not . . . place a stumbling block before the blind" (Lev. 19:14).

14 Than all cattle and all the wild beasts. R. Joshua pointed out, based on this verse, that serpents carry their young for seven years, which they checked and found to be correct. According to tradition, the biblical text has profound allusions and insights into nature and many other things, as I explained in my introduction.

15 They shall strike at your head, and you shall strike at their heel. Her offspring will have an advantage over you in this enmity. You will nip at their heel, but they will crush your brain.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **14 Because you did this.** You may object to the tradition treating the serpent here as one who "entices," since that category applies only to idolatry; but once he tells her "you will be like divine beings" (v. 5), idolatry is exactly what is involved (Hizkuni). Notice once again that the serpent is cursed for what he *did*, not for what he said—he ate from a tree, which he was not supposed to do, and was therefore appropriately cursed that from that time on he would have to eat dirt (Abarbanel). **More cursed shall you be than all cattle.** The Holy One cursed them in the order in which they sinned (Bekhor Shor).

16 אֶל־הָאִשָּׁה אָמַר
הַרְבָּה אַרְבֶּה
עִצְּבוֹנֵךְ וְהֵרֹנֵךְ
בְּעֶצֶב תֵּלְדִי בָנִים
וְאֶל־אִישֵׁךְ תְּשׁוּקָתֵךְ
וְהוּא יִמְשָׁל־בָּךְ׃ ס
17 וּלְאָדָם אָמַר כִּי־שָׁמַעְתָּ לְקוֹל אִשְׁתֶּךָ
וַתֹּאכַל מִן־הָעֵץ אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתִיךָ לֵאמֹר לֹא
תֹאכַל מִמֶּנּוּ
אֲרוּרָה הָאֲדָמָה בַּעֲבוּרֶךָ
בְּעִצָּבוֹן תֹּאכְלֶנָּה
כֹּל יְמֵי חַיֶּיךָ׃

NJPS 16And to the woman He said,
"I will make most severe
Your pangs in childbearing;
In pain shall you bear children.
Yet your urge shall be for your husband,
And he shall rule over you."
17To Adam He said, "Because you did as your wife said and ate of the tree about which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,'
Cursed be the ground because of you;
By toil shall you eat of it
All the days of your life:

OJPS 16Unto the woman He said:
"I will greatly multiply
thy pain and thy travail;
in pain thou shalt bring forth children;
and thy desire shall be to thy husband,
and he shall rule over thee."
17And unto Adam He said: "Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying: Thou shalt not eat of it;
cursed is the ground for thy sake;
in toil shalt thou eat of it
all the days of thy life.

RASHI "broke it to bits" is translated by Onkelos using the verb found in our verse. **You shall strike at their heel**. You will not be tall enough to strike them anywhere but the heel, yet even there you will be able to kill them. — As for the verb here, compare "He *blows* upon them" (Isa. 40:24). When the snake comes to bite, he blows a kind of hiss out of his mouth. So the two "strike" verbs in our verse are a kind of wordplay.

16 Your pangs in childbearing. Rather, your "pain" (OJPS) in child*rearing* and your "travail" (OJPS) in pregnancy. **In pain shall you bear children**. This is the phrase that refers to pain in childbirth. **Yet your urge shall be for your husband**. Your sexual urge: "Like one who is thirsty and dreams he is drinking, but wakes to find himself faint and still *craving* water" (Isa. 29:8). **He shall rule over you**. Nonetheless, you will not have the confidence to express your desires as he will. He will always initiate sex, not you.

17 Cursed be the ground because of you. In two ways. It will produce cursed things for you: flies, fleas, and ants. And as people say when someone's child turns to evil, "Cursed be the breasts that suckled him!"

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ How can the woman's "pangs in childbearing" (v. 16) be considered a curse? This too is simply a part of nature, a medical occurrence to be explained anatomically and physiologically. The most basic reason is simple: a large object must pass through a space far too narrow for it. The rest of what God tells the woman is similarly natural. ✦ Finally, would the man not have had to eat "by toil" (v. 17) whether he had sinned or not? Remember that the man was put in the garden "to till it and tend it" (2:15). Again, all this is nature, not a curse or punishment. ✦ Why is the man told, "Because you did as your wife said," when the woman is not told, "Because you did as the serpent said"? It is much more disreputable for a woman to listen to a serpent than for a man to listen to his wife. And, after all, they were both commanded not to eat, and both should have been punished equally.

RASHBAM **16 And to the woman He said. [I]**

[I] Several sources indicate that Rashbam understood each subsequent phrase of this verse as a stronger way of ensuring that she would not be able to avoid punishment; see Bekhor Shor's comment.

IBN EZRA not in the Hebrew, but NJPS is correct to insert it; see "in the House of the LORD" (2 Kings 12:11, and frequently) for a similar example. For the verb, compare "He *crushes* me for a hair" (Job 9:17), where the second half of the verse, "He wounds me much for no cause," makes the meaning clear. **Their heel.** The opposite of the head. See Josh. 8:13, where our word is used to say that "the main body of the army was disposed on the north of the city, but *the far end* of it was on the west."

16 Your pangs in childbearing. Rather, "your pangs and your pregnancy." The "pangs" are those of losing her virginity. In the Hebrew word translated "childbearing," the נ is definitely a root letter (see my comment to "your belly" of v. 14); the word comes from the verb "to conceive." Pregnancy is very difficult on the woman, as is giving birth. **Your urge**. Rather, "your obedience." You must obey when he commands you, for you are under his authority and must do his will. **[J]**

17 Cursed be the ground. "The ground" (*adamah*) shall be cursed with regard to Adam; it shall not produce much. **By**

[J] In the long commentary Ibn Ezra accepts the standard view and attributes this opinion to "others."

KIMHI instead, "a babe shall play over a viper's hole, and an infant pass his hand over an adder's den" (Isa. 11:8). **They shall strike at your head**. Whenever they can, whenever they find you. Again, all this has an allegorical interpretation as well.

16 Your pangs in childbearing. More literally, "your pain and your travail" ("pain" of OJPS is the same Hebrew word as "toil" of v. 17). My father, of blessed memory, explained these to refer to the heaviness of pregnancy and to its length.

17 Cursed be the ground because of you. Its fertility will be lessened. It will not bring forth everything you plant; many of the seeds will simply die in the ground. **By toil shall you eat of it**. You will have to work before you can eat, though until now you were able to just pick fruit off the trees. "To till it and tend it" (2:15) meant nothing more than light work—not work that would raise a sweat. To 1 Kings 2:7 (Ibn Ezra's example), add

NAHMANIDES **16 Yet your urge shall be for your husband**. What Rashi calls a punishment is actually cited by our Sages in praise of women. As for Ibn Ezra's comment—I cannot find this Hebrew word used anywhere with any sense other than "urge, desire." In my view, her punishment is that she yearns for her husband to such an extent that she pays no mind to the pain of pregnancy and giving birth, though he treats her like a slave. Ordinarily, a slave is not eager to acquire a master for himself, but runs away from him. But this punishment, after all, is measure for measure. She "gave some to her husband, and he ate" (v. 6) at her command; her punishment was that she would no longer command him, but he would command her as he liked.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **16 Yet your urge shall be for your husband**. Don't imagine you will be able to ignore the commandment to be fruitful and multiply the way you ignored the commandment about not eating from the tree (Bekhor Shor). God said to her, "Undoubtedly you chose to do this for one of three reasons: (1) for sex, (2) for children, or (3) to get the man to love you." Her curse corresponds to all three (Abarbanel).

17 Because you did as your wife said and ate of the tree. Now that the evil inclination has entered you, only the threat of death can keep you from destroying the world (Bekhor Shor). **Cursed be the ground because of you**. Not "because of you" but "with regard to your produce"; that is how the Hebrew word is used in Josh. 5:11, "they ate of the *produce* of the country" (Hizkuni).

NJPS [18]Thorns and thistles shall it sprout for you.
But your food shall be the grasses of the field;
[19]By the sweat of your brow
Shall you get bread to eat,
Until you return to the ground—
For from it you were taken.
For dust you are,
And to dust you shall return."
[20]The man named his wife Eve, because

OJPS [18]Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee;
and thou shalt eat the herb of the field.
[19]In the sweat of thy face
shalt thou eat bread,
till thou return unto the ground;
for out of it wast thou taken;
for dust thou art,
and unto dust shalt thou return."
[20]And the man called his wife's name

18 וְקֹוץ וְדַרְדַּר תַּצְמִיחַ לָךְ
וְאָכַלְתָּ אֶת־עֵשֶׂב הַשָּׂדֶה׃
19 בְּזֵעַת אַפֶּיךָ
תֹּאכַל לֶחֶם
עַד שׁוּבְךָ אֶל־הָאֲדָמָה
כִּי מִמֶּנָּה לֻקָּחְתָּ
כִּי־עָפָר אַתָּה
וְאֶל־עָפָר תָּשׁוּב׃
20 וַיִּקְרָא הָאָדָם שֵׁם אִשְׁתּוֹ חַוָּה כִּי

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why is the man told that he must get bread "by the sweat of your brow… until you return to the ground" (v. 19)? Quite obviously, once he returns to the ground he will not be getting bread of any kind, with sweat or without. ✦ Why does "the man name his wife Eve" (v. 20) just at this point in the story? ✦ Why does he name her at all, having already named her "woman" in 2:23? ✦ Why does he name her "Eve," when the corresponding Hebrew word in "the mother of all the living" is spelled with a י, not a ו? These letters frequently interchange, it's true, but as it is the name does not match the explanation. ✦ How can he call her "the mother of all the living" in the first place? She is the mother of all humanity, but certainly not of all living things.

RASHI **18 Thorns and thistles shall it sprout for you.** It, "the ground." No matter what kind of seeds you plant, it will sprout "thorns and thistles"—artichokes and cardoons, which can only be made edible with great effort. **Your food shall be the grasses of the field.** What kind of curse is this? "I give you every seed-bearing plant… for food" (1:29) was given him as a blessing! ("Grasses" in our verse and "plant" in 1:29 are the same Hebrew word; see OJPS.) It is "cursed be the ground" and "thorns and thistles" that turn this into a curse. When you plant beans or vegetables, the ground will sprout thorns and thistles and whatnot, and you will have no choice but to eat them.

19 By the sweat of your brow shall you get bread to eat. That is, only after a lot of hard work.

20 The man named his wife. The text resumes the narrative that began in 2:20. This whole serpent story was inserted only because it followed naturally after 2:25; the serpent saw her naked, saw them having sex, and was filled with desire for her, so he came up with this plot. **Eve.** The Hebrew *ḥavvah* is related to *ḥayyah* ("give life"); the woman brings her children to life. You find a similar *v–y* interchange in "What does a man *get* for all the toiling and worrying he does under the sun?" (Eccles. 2:22), where *hoveh* is related to the standard Hebrew *hayah*.

KIMHI Isa. 36:16; you will find many more of the kind in my *Comprehensive Hebrew Grammar*. **All the days of your life.** As long as the human race lives on earth.

19 By the sweat of your brow shall you get bread to eat. It will take work hard enough to make your whole body sweat. But on the brow the sweat will be visible. Moreover, the rest of the body sweats long before the brow. Only the most intense work will make you sweat there. **Until you return to the ground.** Since you were drawn to your lower element, not your higher one.

20 The man named his wife Eve. He had done this when she was brought before him, just as he had named the animals and the birds. But this was her personal name; the general name was given in 2:23. **Because she was the mother of all the living.** This raises the possibility that he named her Eve only after they ate the fruit, when they felt lust and realized that they would have children.

IBN EZRA **toil shall you eat of it.** "Toil" is the same Hebrew word as "pangs" of v. 16, here referring to breaking up the land and harrowing it before he can sow crops. The Hebrew also says simply "shall you eat it," but this obviously refers to the produce, not the ground; compare 1 Kings 2:7, which literally says, "those that eat your table."

18 Thorns and thistles. Both Hebrew words refer to thorns, large and small. This adds a further grave evil to the "toil" of v. 17, since the thorns grow amid the crops. **The grasses of the field.** That is, bread. For in the garden they lived on fruit.

19 By the sweat of your brow. They will have to slave at winnowing and grinding and kneading and cooking—unlike the way the animals eat. Tradition has explained the word here as "sweat"; it is not used anywhere else in the Bible. But there are other nouns with this form, which clearly derives from a פ״י root. The other noun derived from this root contains the י: "they shall not gird themselves with anything that causes *sweat*" (Ezek. 44:18). **Until you return to the ground—For from it you were taken.** Once again: Since we know that man was created from all four elements, why tell us that he was formed from the earth? Answer: The bones are indeed formed from the dust, which is why they are heavy, have no sensation, and serve as the foundation of the body. Remember, when "the bones came together, bone to matching bone" (Ezek. 37:7), they resembled the frame of a house, after which "there were sinews on them, and flesh had grown, and skin had formed over them" (Ezek. 37:8). Note too that Joseph demands, "you shall carry up my bones from here" (50:25), using "bones" alone to refer to his body.

20 The man named his wife Eve, because she was the mother of all the living. All humanity. The letters ו (as in Eve's name) and י (as in the Hebrew of "living") often interchange; e.g., "you are to *be* their king" (Neh. 6:6). In this case, however, Adam deliberately changed the letter. Otherwise, there would have been no difference between Eve's name and the word for "animal."

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **18 Your food shall be the grasses of the field.** Your level of comprehension will fall to that of the animals (Gersonides).

19 By the sweat of your brow shall you get bread to eat. Adam's curse applies only to farmworkers, but Eve's greater curse applies to all women; she not only sinned, but caused Adam to sin (Hizkuni).

20 The man named his wife. Literally, "called" his wife, using the same Hebrew verb as in 2:23. Once he had been cursed, he no longer wished her to be called "woman" (from "man"), suggesting that they were alike (Abarbanel). **Eve.** The Hebrew *ḥavvah* is related to a verb for speech, as in Ps. 19:3, "Day to day makes utterance, night to night *speaks* out," and Job 36:2, "Wait a little and let me *hold forth*." So "Eve" means "talkative" (Abarbanel). **She was the mother of all the living.** As when Judg. 5:7 calls Deborah "O mother in Israel!" this is not a biological statement but an honorific (Bekhor Shor). Since she so much wanted to be like the snake, he is calling her "mother of all the animals" (Abarbanel).

NJPS she was the mother of all the living. 21And the LORD God made garments of skins for Adam and his wife, and clothed them.

22And the LORD God said, "Now that the man has become like one of us, knowing good and bad, what if he should stretch out his hand and take also from the tree of

OJPS Eve; because she was the mother of all living. 21And the LORD God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins, and clothed them.

22And the LORD God said: "Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil; and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and

הַוָּא הָיְתָה אֵם כָּל־חָי׃ 21 וַיַּעַשׂ יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים לְאָדָם וּלְאִשְׁתּוֹ כָּתְנוֹת עוֹר וַיַּלְבִּשֵׁם׃ רביעי פ

22 וַיֹּאמֶר | יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים הֵן הָאָדָם הָיָה כְּאַחַד מִמֶּנּוּ לָדַעַת טוֹב וָרָע וְעַתָּה | פֶּן־יִשְׁלַח יָדוֹ וְלָקַח גַּם מֵעֵץ הַחַיִּים

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ How can God say, "The man has become like one of us, knowing good and bad" (v. 22)? This is not a particularly divine characteristic, nor have the humans in any way become spiritual beings "like one of us." ✦ Isn't God's saying this a confirmation of what the serpent said in 3:5, "you will be like divine beings"?

RASHI **21 Garments of skins.** Literally "of skin." Some midrashim say that garments as smooth as one's fingernails were attached to their own skin. But others say they did indeed come from the "skins" of animals—like rabbit fur, which is soft and warm—and He made them garments out of it.

22 The man has become like one of us. He is "one," unique in the lower world as I am in the upper world. And what made him unique? — **Knowing good and bad.** Neither cattle nor wild animals have this quality. **What if he should stretch out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever!** In that case, he would likely mislead people into thinking that

KIMHI **21 And the LORD God made garments of skins for Adam and his wife.** In place of the fig leaves they had sewed for themselves. **And clothed them.** In the garments He had made. There is no need to ask how He made these garments. After everything else He had created, this was nothing major. The idea that He literally made "skin" for them (which they had not previously had)—how exactly would this "clothe" them in such a way as to cover their nakedness? Some think He made the garments from the skin of the serpent. But there is no need for all this. He just said the word and created them, perhaps (as the Sages suggest) at twilight on the Friday of creation.

22 What if he should stretch out his hand and take also from the tree of life? This was not originally forbidden to him; see my comment to 2:17. Now, however, he had been cursed with dying before his time, and he had to be expelled from the garden because

NAHMANIDES **22 What if he should stretch out his hand.** The Holy One wished to enforce His decree that the man should die. But if he ate from the tree of life, which was created to give those who eat from it eternal life, the decree would be annulled. Either he would not die at all, or his day would not come at the time decreed for him by his nature. Now that he had free will, the tree had to be guarded from him. For originally he would do nothing but what he was commanded. He would not have eaten from this tree, for he had no need to. You must understand and believe that the garden of Eden exists here on earth, along with its tree of life and tree of knowledge. For "a river issues from Eden to water the garden, and it then divides and becomes four branches" (2:10), which we indeed see: the Euphrates in our land and on our border, and the Pishon—the Nile, as tradition says. Ibn Ezra denies this in his comment to 2:14, but there are plenty of rivers that flow a long way from their sources, dive underground, and reemerge at the base of a mountain far away. **[H]** But just as they are here on earth, there are others by the same name in heaven that are the foundation of these. A midrash on the verse "The king has brought me to his chambers" (Song 1:4) says that the four rivers match four heavenly camps, from which the four kingdoms on earth draw their power. As the prophet says, "In that day, the LORD will punish the host of heaven in heaven and the kings of the earth on earth" (Isa. 24:21). As for the heavenly tree of life and tree of knowledge, they are a lofty mystery indeed. The man sinned with fruit of the lower tree of knowledge *and* the higher one, in deed and in thought. If the tree were really "good for eating and . . . desirable as a source of

[H] See, in apparent contrast, Nahmanides' comments to 2:11.

RASHBAM **21 And the LORD God made garments of skins for Adam and his wife, and clothed them.** Rather, garments for *their* skins, garments that would clothe the entire body, not just from the waist down like the loincloths of v. 7.

IBN EZRA **21 Garments of skins.** The Hebrew says merely "of skin" in the singular. Some think this means that originally they were nothing but flesh and bone, and that now He covered them with skin; others think that the phrase means "garments *for* [their] skin." Still others believe there are animals who resemble human beings, and that the Holy One commanded that these be stripped of their skins. It is not really our business to pry into whether these garments were made of rabbit fur or whatever. Ours is merely to believe that the Holy One made them garments of skin. "Who can tell the mighty acts of the LORD" (Ps. 106:2) or recount His marvelous deeds? "His greatness cannot be fathomed" (Ps. 145:3).

22 The man has become like one of us. If the Hebrew meant that man had become "one," both the vowels of that word and the punctuation would be different; it would have to say, "Now the man has become like one. Of us, knowing good and bad." That interpretation is grammatically impossible. (What sense would it make anyway?) As for "of us," it is definitely first person plural and not third person singular. **[K]** I explained in my grammar why the Hebrew word has a double נ; the Easterners who pronounce it with a single נ are in error. Becoming "like one of us" corresponds to "you will be like divine beings who know good and bad" of v. 5. Or perhaps it is saying, "The man 'has become like one of us'"—he *thinks* he has. In any case, there is no need for surprise at the Holy One's saying "us." Remember "Let us make man in our image" (1:26) and "Let us, then, go

[K] The Hebrew word could also mean "of him." Ibn Ezra's comments are directed against Onkelos, who takes the verse to mean, "Now the man has become 'one,' *on his own* knowing good and bad."

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **21 And the LORD God made garments of skins for Adam and his wife, and clothed them.** If He had waited for them to figure out how to do this on their own, they would have died, of heat or cold (Gersonides). He did not want to expel them naked, lest they figure out how to clothe themselves afterward and puff themselves up with pride (Sforno).

22 Now that the man has become like one of us. The Holy One, out of modesty, puts Himself on the same level as His attendants. It is the way of those who clothe themselves in modesty to call their attendants and students "friends" (Bekhor Shor). Rather, "The man was like one of us!" The Holy One was angry that man had rebelled even though he had the capacity of attaining the comprehension of the upper beings (Gersonides). **What if he should stretch out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever!** Obviously the Holy One could have stopped him from eating from the tree of life. But the aspect of Justice wished to test the man again by

NJPS life and eat, and live forever!" [23]So the LORD God banished him from the garden of Eden, to till the soil from which he was taken. [24]He drove the man out, and stationed east of the garden of

OJPS eat, and live for ever." [23]Therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken. [24]So He drove out the man; and He placed at the east of the

וְאָכַל וְחַי לְעֹלָם׃ [23] וַיְשַׁלְּחֵהוּ יְהוָה
אֱלֹהִים מִגַּן־עֵדֶן לַעֲבֹד אֶת־הָאֲדָמָה
אֲשֶׁר לֻקַּח מִשָּׁם׃ [24] וַיְגָרֶשׁ אֶת־הָאָדָם
וַיַּשְׁכֵּן מִקֶּדֶם לְגַן־עֵדֶן אֶת־הַכְּרֻבִים וְאֵת

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Isn't it redundant to say both "the LORD God banished him from the garden of Eden" (v. 23) and also "He drove the man out" (v. 24)? ✦ What are "the cherubim and the fiery ever-turning sword," which are spoken of here as if we have already heard about them? ✦ Are these the same cherubim as those found in the Tabernacle (see Exodus 25) or in Ezekiel's second vision (see Ezekiel 10)? If not, what are they? ✦ Why are they guarding "the way to the tree of life"? Aren't they preventing the humans from entering the garden at all, not just from eating from the tree of life? ✦ Why throughout this episode are we told about "the Lord God" rather than simply "God" as in ch. 1 or "the Lord" as in ch. 4?

RASHI he too is a god. — There are many midrashim based on this phrase, but they do not fit the straightforward sense very well.

24 East of the garden of Eden. **[O]** **The cherubim.** Destructive angels. **The fiery ever-turning sword.** Rather, as Onkelos translates, "the blade of the ever-turning sword," to frighten them from trying

[O] Rashi and other commentators emphasize that the cherubim were stationed "in the east," not "of old" as Onkelos takes it.

KIMHI otherwise he might eat of this tree and *lengthen* his life. By "also" God meant: "If I leave him in the garden, even if I now command him not to eat from this tree, he will violate My commandment just as he did with the other tree."

23 To till the soil. He wasn't willing to do this easily in the garden; now he will do it with much more difficulty outside. **From which he was taken.** The very place from which he was taken and brought to the garden. Or perhaps it means, "from which he was created," as Onkelos took it.

24 And stationed east of the garden of Eden the cherubim. That is, cherubim appeared to be there, to frighten the man so that he would not go back into the garden. **And the fiery ever-turning sword.** To frighten him still more. The Hebrew literally says

NAHMANIDES wisdom" (v. 6), why would the Holy One have stopped him from eating it? God "does not withhold His bounty from those who live without blame" (Ps. 84:12). As for the serpent, he certainly does not have the power to speak nowadays, and if he had it originally his curse would surely have said that he was being turned into a mute; that curse would have been worse than all the others. But all these things are double. Both the open meaning and the sealed one are true. Genesis Rabbah tells us that the offerings were to make the tree of life and the tree of knowledge and all the other trees of the garden sprout and grow—that was the "tilling and tending" that the man was to do.

IBN EZRA down" (11:7). This is the Holy One speaking with the angels. **What if he should stretch out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever!** This tree would greatly increase one's lifespan. But "forever" is not the correct translation here; the same word is used as in Exod. 21:6, where the slave who declines to go free after six years has his ear pierced, after which "he shall remain his slave *forever*," or when Hannah promises to bring Samuel to the Lord, after which "he must remain there *for good*" (1 Sam. 1:22), neither of which can be taken literally. There are many other examples of this usage. Many commentators take "you must not eat of it; for as soon as you eat of it, you shall die" (2:17) to imply that man was created immortal, and death was decreed on him only because he sinned, to which many others respond by asking, "How did his offspring sin?" But all this is pointless. In this world, man and beast are alike; "as the one dies so dies the other" (Eccles. 3:19). Only in his higher aspect does man have "superiority over beast" (Eccles. 3:19). One of the Greek physicians has proved conclusively that it is impossible for human life to be unending.

23 So the LORD God banished him from the garden. When this Hebrew verb is followed by the preposition "from," it does indeed mean "banish," as in "*Dismiss* them from My presence" (Jer. 15:1). It certainly is not, as one great Spanish scholar thought, used here as a mark of honor, the way this verb can be elsewhere: "Abraham walking with them *to see them off*" (18:16). If man had really been "escorted" from the garden, this would be showing more honor to "the soil" outside the garden than to the garden itself.

24 He drove the man out. If "banished" is correct in v. 23, one might ask why our verse needs to add that "He drove the man out." What it is really saying is, "When the LORD God banished him from the garden of Eden," He stationed the cherubim there. **East of the garden of Eden.** For the entrance to the garden was on that side—both factually and allegorically. **The cherubim.** Some say, based on an Aramaic pun, that these resembled children. But in my opinion they can resemble any kind of being. If you compare the verses, you will see that "the face of an ox" in Ezek. 1:10 is described in Ezek. 10:14 as "the cherub's face." (It was not *changed* into a cherub; **[L]** the Golden Calf was not made in Ezekiel's time.) The continuation there clinches it: "They were the same creatures that I had seen below the God of Israel at the Chebar Canal; so now I knew that they were cherubs" (Ezek. 10:20). You see, any image of an ox can be called a "cherub," but not every "cherub" is an ox. In our verse, of course, "the" cherubim are the angels. **The fiery ever-turning sword.** "Ever-turning" in the

[L] As B. Hag. 13b says it was.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS commanding him not to eat from this tree, too. The Holy One knew he would fail this test as well and preempted it by expelling him, so that He could claim that the man would *not* have disobeyed that command. Moreover, if they had children inside the garden, the children—who would not have sinned—might indeed eat of the tree and live forever (Hizkuni). "What good would it do him if he should take also from the tree of life? His attainment of good and evil will prevent him from achieving the eternal life that he was intended for." Nonetheless, those who think it would be better if man did not have free will are saying it would be better if he did not have intelligence, for the two are inextricably linked. Man's free will is obviously a tool by which he can achieve perfection; the fact that free will sometimes takes him in the direction of imperfection is because of the nature of matter. In fact, one of the reasons this story is here is that the Torah needed to explain why the Torah had to be given to man (Gersonides).

23 So the LORD God banished him from the garden. Rather, "sent him forth" (OJPS). It does not refer to expulsion, but to being sent forth prepared for the work he would now have to do, as in 45:5, when Joseph tells his brothers, "it was to save life that God *sent* me ahead of you" (Abarbanel).

24 He drove the man out. So that neither he nor his descendants would ever return there (Sforno). **And stationed east of the garden of Eden the cherubim and the fiery ever-turning sword.** The cherubim (which, as we see from Ezek. 1:10 and 10:14, were

NJPS Eden the cherubim and the fiery ever-turning sword, to guard the way to the tree of life.

OJPS garden of Eden the cherubim, and the flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way to the tree of life.

לַהַט הַחֶרֶב הַמִּתְהַפֶּכֶת לִשְׁמֹר אֶת־דֶּרֶךְ עֵץ הַחַיִּים׃ ס

ד וְהָאָדָם יָדַע אֶת־חַוָּה אִשְׁתּוֹ וַתַּהַר וַתֵּלֶד אֶת־קַיִן וַתֹּאמֶר קָנִיתִי אִישׁ אֶת־

4 Now the man knew his wife Eve, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, "I have gained a male child with the help

4 And the man knew Eve his wife; and she conceived and bore Cain, and said: "I have gotten a man with the help of

RASHI to reenter the garden. There are many midrashim about this, too. But, as I said, I intend only to explain the straightforward sense of the text.

4:1 Now the man knew his wife. Rather, he "had known" her already before the events of ch. 3, when they sinned and were forced out of the garden. Not only had they had intercourse, but she had already gotten pregnant and given birth. Grammatically, it would require not *ve-ha'adam yada* (as is actually written) but the standard narrative tense, *va-yéda ha'adam* (compare v. 25) to indicate that they had children only after they were forced out. **Cain.** Commemorating the fact that she had "gained" (*kaniti*) a child. **With the help of the LORD.** "Help" is not in the Hebrew; she is saying that she gained a child "along with" the Lord. "When He created me and my husband, He created us by Himself. But this time we are partners with Him."

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why is it that Cain and Abel are presented as sons of their mother (v. 1), when all the other children of the early generations are described in relation to their fathers? ✦ Why are we given an explanation for Cain's name—"I have gained a male child"—but not for Abel's?

KIMHI "the flame of the sword"—a flame is an appearance, not a physical object. Again, this was a sight that was to frighten the man, the more so as it was ever turning: "I will strike many peoples with horror . . . when I brandish *My sword* before them" (Ezek. 32:10). **To guard the way to the tree of life.** Another reason for doing this was to get the man to beat himself up and repent. So the Holy One was teaching him the way of repentance. Once he repented, the cherubim and the sword vanished, and he did indeed return to the garden from time to time.

4:1 Now the man knew his wife Eve. Since the power of lust had been awakened in both of them, he knew his wife and she conceived. **She conceived and bore.** There is certainly no proof from this phrase that she conceived and gave birth all in a single day, as the midrash claims. Sarah too "conceived and bore" (21:2). **Cain.** She bore a son whom she *named* Cain. **I have gained a male child with the help of the LORD.** What Eve was saying is, "I have caused there to be in the world a person who was not created as we were, and I did this along with the Lord, who put His part into the child by breathing a soul into him while he was still in my womb." The Hebrew verb to "gain" can refer to gaining something by creating it: "*creator* of heaven and earth" (14:19,22). Eve uses the Tetragrammaton alone because creation (achieved by God) was now over, and the created things would henceforth reproduce themselves by natural means. From this point on, the Holy One is sometimes referred to as God, sometimes as Lord, and rarely by both of them together. In each case, there is a reason for the choice. (See also Ibn Ezra's comment.)

NAHMANIDES **4:1 She conceived and bore Cain.** What it means, of course, is that she conceived and bore a son, whom she then *named* Cain, for the reason that the verse goes on to explain. See similarly v. 17 and many other such occurrences, both here and throughout the Bible. **I have gained a male child with the help of the LORD.** Despite Rashi's comment, what I think she is saying here is "This son will be a gain for me, for the Lord." When we die, he will remain in our stead to serve his Creator. Onkelos thought the same, for he translated the final phrase as "before the Lord." The particle *et* here—which Rashi understands to mean "with"—actually means "to" or "for." Compare "It shall be shown *to* the priest" (Lev. 13:49); "David came forward *to* the troops" (1 Sam. 30:21). Alternatively, it could really mean "with," but as in "Enoch walked *with* God" (5:24); "Noah walked *with* God" (6:9): "I have gained a child [who will be] *with* the Lord."

IBN EZRA sense that it had two sharp edges, not just one. The commentators who say that the "fire" or "flame" of this sword was the sun are wrong. **[M]**

You should know that everything we find written in this chapter is true. That is how it was; there is no doubt about it. Yet there is a deeper meaning to it all, **[N]** since from the light of reason desire comes forth. From the second level it goes upward, for the direction of desire is forward; the fig leaf represents this. **[O]** The third level is the world of choice. For reason and desire are only potential, not activated. One who understands this mystery will also understand how the river could divide and become four branches. All this is the mystery of the garden of Eden. The "garments of skin" likewise teach this mystery, that man has the capacity to live forever. The wise will understand, "for this applies to all mankind" (Eccles. 12:13). **[P]**

4:1 Now the man knew his wife Eve. Seeing that he himself would not live in his body forever, he was forced to propagate the species. **I have gained a male child with the help of the LORD.** A possible alternative to "with [the help of]" here is "from." You will find *et* used this way in "As I go out *from* the city" (Exod. 9:29). Note that there is no mention here of "God" (that is, *elohim*, the angels), as in "LORD God" of chs. 2–3. For now the Lord would be on earth, in the human species, as He is on high among the heavenly bodies. Be aware that "good" is a quality of the universal, which is why "God saw *all* that He had made, and found it very good" (1:31). Evil relates only to particulars. **[Q]**

[M] In the long commentary, where he expands on the allegorical interpretation of the story, Ibn Ezra says that "the fiery ever-turning sword" does represent the sun. **[N]** Here Ibn Ezra becomes deliberately obscure. **[O]** Ibn Ezra may also be hinting that *aleh* ("leaf") can also be read as *oleh* ("goes up"). **[P]** See further Ibn Ezra's comment to "I am the LORD" (Lev. 18:6). **[Q]** See Special Topics, "Medieval Jewish Philosophy."

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS oxen) were for plowing. Now that the man was thrown out of the garden, the cherubim would do his "tilling" and the sword would do the "tending," that is, the guarding (Bekhor Shor). **To guard the way to the tree of life.** So that they could not turn aside on their way out and have a bite of it (Sforno).

4:1 She conceived and bore Cain. We must certainly admit that the serpent was allegorical. But Eve is obviously not allegorical; here she is, having a baby (Gersonides). **I have gained a male child.** By means of my body and my "pangs in childbearing" (3:16). If I caused one man to die, now I have repaid that debt (Bekhor Shor). She was proud: "A female came forth from you, but now a male has come forth from me and we are even." It is not an explanation for the name; see my second comment to v. 2 (Abarbanel).

יְהוָה׃ 2 וַתֹּסֶף לָלֶדֶת אֶת־אָחִיו אֶת־הָבֶל
וַיְהִי־הֶבֶל רֹעֵה צֹאן וְקַיִן הָיָה עֹבֵד
אֲדָמָה׃ 3 וַיְהִי מִקֵּץ יָמִים וַיָּבֵא קַיִן מִפְּרִי

NJPS of the LORD." 2She then bore his brother Abel. Abel became a keeper of sheep, and Cain became a tiller of the soil. 3In the course of time, Cain brought an offering to the LORD from the fruit of

OJPS the LORD." 2And again she bore his brother Abel. And Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. 3And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ It makes sense for Cain to become "a tiller of the soil," so that he could eat bread, but why did Abel become "a keeper of sheep" (v. 2)? Eating meat was forbidden! ✦ What moved Cain (v. 3) and Abel (v. 4) to bring offerings to the Lord? Adam never did so.

RASHI **2 She then bore his brother Abel.** More literally, "she *additionally* bore *with* his brother, *with* Abel." As in "along *with* the Lord" of v. 1, the word *et* means "with"; it is used to indicate that a text requires amplification. The same word occurs just once before "Cain" in v. 1. This teaches us that a twin sister was born "with" Cain, and that *two* twin sisters were born "with" Abel. Notice that the Hebrew does not say she "then" bore Abel. **A keeper of sheep.** Since the ground had been cursed, he refrained from tilling it.

3 From the fruit of the soil. From the worst of it. According to one midrash, what he brought was flaxseed.

RASHBAM **4:3 An offering.** The Hebrew word really refers to a gift, something that is "brought." It is derived from the same root as the similar-sounding word in Exod. 32:34, "Go now, *lead* the people where I told you." **[J]**

[J] See Rashbam's comment to Lev. 2:1.

IBN EZRA **3 In the course of time.** When Cain had had a chance to work the ground. But "time" here is literally "days," which in my opinion is idiomatic for a full (solar) year, the length of time after which the days return to precisely the same length they originally had (whether short or long). Compare "If it is not redeemed before a full *year* has elapsed" (Lev. 25:30); "from *year* to *year*" (Exod. 13:10); and "after two *years'* time" (41:1), literally "two years of days." The point of the idiom in an expression like this is to preclude the meaning "two calendar years," which might not be full years. Similarly we find the expression "a whole month" (Num. 11:20)—literally, "a month's worth of days." But the 1,290 days and 1,335 days of Dan. 12:11 are literally days, since specific numbers are given. **Cain brought an offering to the LORD.** To the place he had established for prayer. I cannot agree with those who say Cain brought this offering to his father.

KIMHI **2 She then bore his brother Abel.** The fact that she is not first said to conceive again supports the traditional assertion that they were twins. But like the names from Seth until Noah, no explanation is given for why she named him Abel—perhaps along the lines of "Men are mere *breath*; mortals, illusion" (Ps. 62:10). One cannot assume things will stay as they are; the good can quickly turn sour, as she and her husband had already seen when they were expelled from the garden. That is probably why she and her husband named him Abel. **Abel became a keeper of sheep, and Cain became a tiller of the soil.** When they grew up, they chose different ways of life. Abel drank milk to survive and wore wool clothing. Neither of them ate meat, which was as yet forbidden.

3 In the course of time. It does not say how much time, but the Hebrew expression—literally "days"—is sometimes used to indicate a year. **Cain brought an offering to the LORD from the fruit of the soil.** After a year of tilling the soil, Cain brought an offering to the place that Adam had fixed for prayer and sacrifices, which he performed along with his sons. For Adam too brought offerings, both fruits of the soil and sheep and cattle, as a way of thanking God. Though the text says nothing of this, our Sages do describe it. His sons learned from him what to do, and each brought an offering of thanks to God from what his particular line of work had produced. Our verse does not say what particular kind of plant Cain's offering was, but apparently it was of a lesser grade, or perhaps it was what was left after he himself had eaten—in either case, somewhat insulting. That is why his offering was not accepted. He also did not bring the "first" fruits, because the text would have told us so, as it does with Abel. The midrash claims it was flax, and that the prohibition against a garment "combining wool and linen" (Deut. 22:11) is to keep what Cain offered from mixing with what Abel offered.

NAHMANIDES **2 She then bore his brother Abel.** She identified her first son as a *kinyan*, a gain, and her second as *hevel*, a vapor, for all man's gains are like a breath. But she did not want to say that explicitly, so no explanation is given for this second name. The mystical secret behind the Abel episode is great indeed. **[I]**

3–4 Cain brought an offering to the LORD from the fruit of the soil; and Abel, for his part, brought the choicest of the firstlings of his flock. These men understood the great mystery of the sacrifices and offerings, as did Noah. Our Sages say even Adam brought an offering of a bull. This should stop up the mouths of those who spout vapor about the sacrifices. God willing, I will allude further to this topic later on. **[J]**

[I] Nahmanides is assumed to be hinting at reincarnation. **[J]** See Nahmanides' comment to Lev. 1:9.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **2 She then bore his brother Abel.** This name was prophetic; perhaps Adam knew that, through prophecy or magic. He was certainly enough of a sage to name the animals (Gersonides). Both boys took after their mother, not their father (Abarbanel). **Abel became a keeper of sheep, and Cain became a tiller of the soil.** Both of these professions—raising animals and raising crops—are incredibly difficult to develop. No one could possibly have figured out, through experiment or chance, how to raise silkworms; and the same is true of growing plants. That is why the Torah honors those who developed these professions, which even so must have required some emanation from the divine (Gersonides). Cain had no fear of God, and feared nothing for the curse of 3:17; his name alludes to his many *kinyanim* ("acquisitions"). Abel became a shepherd because he wanted creatures he could lord it over—hence his name, which means "vanity." He had butter, milk, and cheese to eat, and wool and leather to wear; he was proud of having so much more than his father (Abarbanel).

3 Cain brought an offering to the LORD from the fruit of the soil. Not in thanks, but due to his rivalry with his brother (Abarbanel). **Abel, for his part, brought the choicest of the firstlings of his flock.** After they quarreled about whose profession God would prefer, Abel "also" (OJPS) brought an offering: "Let the Lord see and judge!" As Rabbenu Nissim nicely points out, he never thought of bringing an offering until Cain did so; then, his only intention was to make his older brother look bad. That is why Cain was "distressed" (Abarbanel).

NJPS the soil; [4]and Abel, for his part, brought the choicest of the firstlings of his flock. The LORD paid heed to Abel and his offering, [5]but to Cain and his offering He paid no heed. Cain was much distressed and his face fell. [6]And the LORD said to Cain,

"Why are you distressed,
And why is your face fallen?
[7]Surely, if you do right,
There is uplift.
But if you do not do right
Sin couches at the door;
Its urge is toward you,
Yet you can be its master."

OJPS offering unto the LORD. [4]And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the LORD had respect unto Abel and to his offering; [5]but unto Cain and to his offering He had not respect. And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell. [6]And the LORD said unto Cain:

"Why art thou wroth?
and why is thy countenance fallen?
[7]If thou doest well,
shall it not be lifted up?
and if thou doest not well,
sin coucheth at the door;
and unto thee is its desire,
but thou mayest rule over it."

הָאֲדָמָה מִנְחָה לַיהוָה׃ [4] וְהֶבֶל הֵבִיא
גַם־הוּא מִבְּכֹרוֹת צֹאנוֹ וּמֵחֶלְבֵהֶן* וַיִּשַׁע
יְהוָה אֶל־הֶבֶל וְאֶל־מִנְחָתוֹ׃ [5] וְאֶל־קַיִן
וְאֶל־מִנְחָתוֹ לֹא שָׁעָה וַיִּחַר לְקַיִן מְאֹד
וַיִּפְּלוּ פָנָיו׃ [6] וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־קָיִן
לָמָּה חָרָה לָךְ
וְלָמָּה נָפְלוּ פָנֶיךָ׃
[7] הֲלוֹא אִם־תֵּיטִיב
שְׂאֵת
וְאִם לֹא תֵיטִיב
לַפֶּתַח חַטָּאת רֹבֵץ
וְאֵלֶיךָ תְּשׁוּקָתוֹ
וְאַתָּה תִּמְשָׁל־בּוֹ׃

ב׳ רפה *v. 4.*

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why did the Lord "pay no heed" (v. 4) to Cain's offering? ✦ Why did the Lord ask Cain, "Why are you distressed?" (v. 6)? Wasn't it obvious? Reproving him just added insult to injury.

RASHI **4 The LORD paid heed.** He "turned" to it; similarly in v. 5, He "did not turn" to it. See *"they shall not turn* to the altars that their own hands made" (Isa. 17:8); *"Turn* away from him" (Job 14:6). What actually happened was that fire came down from heaven and licked up his offering.

7 Surely, if you do right. Onkelos explains this verse correctly: "If you act better, you will be forgiven. If you do not, your sin will be kept for the day of judgment, when you will be punished if you have not yet repented. But if you repent, you will be forgiven." **Sin couches at the door.** It is waiting for you at the entrance to your

KIMHI **4 Abel, for his part, brought.** Whether before or after Cain. If before, saying that he "also" brought (OJPS) follows the narrative, not the chronology. **The choicest of the firstlings of his flock.** Out of respect. This way, God would benefit from them before he himself did. The "choicest" are the fattest (see OJPS). The text does not tell us whether or not he built an altar as Noah did (see 8:20). I imagine he did not slaughter it, but laid it, alive and bound, on the prearranged spot so that fire could come down from heaven and consume it, as had happened with his father's offerings. Again, they did not slaughter animals because they did not eat meat. So if he really offered only the fat, as some of the Sages think, he must have left the rest for animals and birds to eat. But I lean toward the opinion that they were whole offerings. **The LORD paid heed to Abel and his offering.** He accepted the offering, because Abel's intentions were good.

5 But to Cain and his offering He paid no heed. Cain's intentions were not good and the Lord did not accept his offering. How did Cain know? Fire came down from heaven to consume Abel's offering but not his.

6 The LORD said to Cain. To correct him, and to teach him and future generations the way of repentance. There is expiation for the sinner if he repents completely.

7 Its urge is toward you. Always wanting to lead you astray and lusting to trip you up: "I am my beloved's, and his *desire* is for me" (Song 7:11). **Yet you can be its master.** It will master you if you do not rid yourself of it, but you can master it and force it to submit to you. — The Holy One thereby showed him that he had the power of free will, just as Moses

RASHBAM **7 Surely, if you do right, there is uplift.** Rather, "if you do better, it will be bearable." As long as you transgress very little, you will find your punishment easier to bear. **But if you do not do right sin couches at the door.** Rather, "[*you* will be] crouching at the door of sin." If you

IBN EZRA **4 Abel, for his part, brought the choicest of the firstlings of his flock.** It stands to reason that we are being told this to imply that Cain did not bring the first fruits as his offering. **The LORD paid heed.** That is, He accepted the offering. "*Let* me *be*" (Isa. 22:4, using the same verb) expressly demonstrates the idea behind sacrifices. **[R]** Possibly fire came down from heaven and consumed Abel's offering but not Cain's.

7 There is uplift. According to most commentators, this refers to Cain's sin being "lifted up" and forgiven. But in my view it refers to being able to hold one's head up high. Remember that Cain's "face fell" (v. 5) in shame. As Abner said to Asahel, if I kill you, "how then should I *hold up my face* to Joab your brother?" (2 Sam. 2:22); similarly "you will hold your head high" (Job 11:15). **Sin couches at the door.** Some commentators take this to mean "Your sin"—that is, your transgression, matching the masculine

[R] The animal's death substitutes for that of the person making the offering.

NAHMANIDES **7 Surely, if you do right, there is uplift.** See Ibn Ezra's comment. He might also have cited "perhaps he will *show me favor*" (32:21) and "do not *favor* the poor" (Lev. 19:15). But in my opinion the phrase means, "Surely, if you do right, you will be lifted above your brother [since you are the first-born]." This was the point of the Lord's question in v. 6. **But if you do not do right sin couches at the door.** Why are you distressed? If you do right, you will be lifted above your brother. But if you do not, your problems will not just be from him—your sin will be couching at the door of your house, waiting to trip you up wherever you go. **Its urge is toward you.** It wants to cling to you for your life long. **Yet you can be its master.** If you want to. You can do the right thing and remove sin from

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **5 But to Cain and his offering He paid no heed.** Cain did everything he could, but the rain did not fall at the proper time (Gersonides). Abel was as hungry for glory as Cain was for wealth. But he at least conducted himself like a free man, while Cain was a slave to the soil; and his was an animal offering, while Cain's was of plants (Abarbanel). **Cain was much distressed.** He was resentful of his younger brother claiming a higher place, and was afraid that Abel's superiority would continue through their descendants as the world was settled (Abarbanel).

7 Surely, if you do right, there is uplift. Rather, "if you improve your gift." If you bring a gift that is accepted, that would be better (Hizkuni). If you do right, the plants will lift up their fruit as you hoped, for I will make it rain at the proper time (Gersonides). **But if you do not do right sin couches at the door.** *Your* sin, the sin of bringing an improper offering to the Holy One (Bekhor Shor). Rather, "at the

NJPS 8Cain said to his brother Abel ... and when they were in the field, Cain set upon his brother Abel and killed him. 9The LORD said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?" And he said, "I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?" 10Then He said, "What have you done? Hark, your brother's blood cries out to Me from the

8 וַיֹּאמֶר קַיִן אֶל־הֶבֶל אָחִיו וַיְהִי בִּהְיוֹתָם
בַּשָּׂדֶה וַיָּקָם קַיִן אֶל־הֶבֶל אָחִיו וַיַּהַרְגֵהוּ׃
9 וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־קַיִן אֵי הֶבֶל אָחִיךָ
וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא יָדַעְתִּי הֲשֹׁמֵר אָחִי אָנֹכִי׃
10 וַיֹּאמֶר מֶה עָשִׂיתָ קוֹל דְּמֵי אָחִיךָ

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why did Cain kill Abel (v. 8)? Abel had done nothing wrong to him.

OJPS 8And Cain spoke unto Abel his brother. And it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him.

9And the LORD said unto Cain: "Where is Abel thy brother?" And he said: "I know not; am I my brother's keeper?" 10And He said: "What hast thou done? the voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto Me from

RASHI grave. **Its urge is toward you.** Sin's urge, the urge of the evil inclination. It is always thirsting to cause your downfall. **Yet you can be its master.** You can overcome it if you wish to.

8 Cain said to his brother Abel . . . and when they were in the field. Cain started a quarrel with him to kill him. Here too there are many midrashim, but this explains the difficulty in the verse.

9 Where is your brother Abel? The point was to ease into conversation with him, hoping he would repent and admit, "I killed him, and I sinned against You." **I do not know.** He was attempting to fool the One on high. **Am I my brother's keeper?** Note the compound *sheva* under the ה of *ha-shomer*. This is not the word "the," but the standard way of indicating a question in Biblical Hebrew.

10 Your brother's blood. Literally, his "bloods"—his own blood and the blood of all the descendants he would have had. Another reading: the plural indicates that Cain wounded him in many different places, not knowing from which one his soul would depart.

KIMHI told us: "See, I set before you this day life and prosperity, death and adversity . . . Choose life" (Deut. 30:15,19).

8 Cain said to his brother Abel . . . Apparently he did not repent, but did something even worse. Cain repeated to Abel how God had rebuked him, and he blamed Abel for it, getting angrier and angrier as he spoke. He did not do this in front of their father, out of fear of him, but waited until the two of them were in the field, Abel to check on his sheep and Cain to tend his crops. Then he picked a fight with his brother and killed him.

9 The LORD said to Cain. The divine utterance came to him to inform him that no one can hide from God. Murdering Abel in the field was enough to hide it from Adam, but not from the Holy One. **Where is your brother Abel?** See 3:9. **I do not know.** Cain assumed that it was a real question and thought he could lie to Him. **Am I my brother's keeper?** He went to do his work and I went to do mine. Am I supposed to follow him everywhere he goes? — Note that Adam in 3:9 did not try to lie. He knew quite well that the Holy One knew all. He hid only out of embarrassment.

10 Hark, your brother's blood cries out to Me from the ground! This is a metaphor, of course. "The ground" is where Cain spilled Abel's blood. "Blood" in Hebrew can be either in the singular or (as here and many other places) in the plural; the singular refers

NAHMANIDES yourself. — He was teaching him about repentance. It was within his power to repent at any moment he wished; and then he would be forgiven.

8 Cain said to his brother Abel . . . See the comments of Rashi and Ibn Ezra. But in my opinion the next phrase creates the context for this one. He said to him, "Let's go out to the field," and killed him there in secret. He may have killed him with the intent that the entire population of the world would descend from himself, Cain, alone (imagining that his father would have no more children). He was afraid that his brother would play the main role in populating the world, since his offering had been accepted.

RASHBAM commit many transgressions, you will be crushed under the weight of your sin and under punishments you cannot bear.

IBN EZRA verb—"couches at the door of the grave, on the day of judgment." **Its urge is toward you.** The masculine suffix would then have to mean not "its" but "his"—Abel's—obedience **[S]** is toward you. "Why are you distressed that I accepted Abel's offering? He obeys you as if you were his master." Others think "its" refers to the evil inclination, though this expression occurs nowhere in the text. They understand sin to be couching "at the door" of Cain's house—it walks with him always. Others say it refers to the "door" of the mouth, an expression that occurs in Mic. 7:5. In my opinion, "sin" in our verse is shorthand for "the sin of the evil inclination." Since "inclination" is a masculine noun, this would explain the masculine verb; the continuation would then be saying, "its obedience can return to you if you exercise your willpower—for **you** have the power to **be its master.** Onkelos did not translate the words of this verse as they are.

8 Cain said to his brother Abel . . . To me, the most plausible explanation of what he said to him is that he told him how the Holy One had rebuked him: "And Cain said [it] to his brother Abel." Or "Cain said [something] *against* his brother Abel" (using *el* as if it were *al*, which sometimes happens; compare Deut. 19:11). **Cain set upon his brother Abel and killed him.** Some people who were born in a fog wonder how he could have killed him, when there was no such thing as a sword in the world yet. What a pointless question. He could easily have strangled him. Anyway, there were thousands of sticks and stones lying around.

9 Where. The Hebrew says merely the equivalent of English "w . . ."; as in English, it is the addition of this "w" that turns "here" into the question "where."

10 Hark, your brother's blood cries out to Me from the ground! The overly literal translation of OJPS misses the fact that the verb clearly matches "blood" (both are plural in Hebrew) and not the singular "voice." You will find this same usage of "voice" as "Hark!" in "Hark! My beloved!" (Song 2:8), as I explained in my commentary on the Song of Songs. The Holy One has heard the cries of Abel's blood, which spilled out on the ground—in many different places, hence the plural. Onkelos takes the plural of "blood" to indicate that

[S] See Ibn Ezra's comment to "your urge" (3:16).

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS *opening"* of your words; you cannot talk your way out of this (Hizkuni). My providence will abandon you, and the astrological fate that has been waiting for you since birth will be (as it were) at your door. It is your choice; free will can overcome fate (Gersonides). **Its urge.** The Hebrew phrase is also found only in Song 7:11 (Masorah).

8 Cain said to his brother Abel. The point of telling his brother what the Holy One had said to him was to claim that they had made up. That is what fooled Abel into letting down his guard (Bekhor Shor). He drew him along in conversation to get him out of sight of their father (Abarbanel). And of their mother. What he told him was how angry he was (Sforno).

NJPS ground! [11]Therefore, you shall be more cursed than the ground, which opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. [12]If you till the soil, it shall no longer yield its strength to you. You shall become a ceaseless wanderer on earth."

צֹעֲקִים אֵלַי מִן־הָאֲדָמָה׃ 11 וְעַתָּה אָרוּר
אָתָּה מִן־הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר פָּצְתָה אֶת־פִּיהָ
לָקַחַת אֶת־דְּמֵי אָחִיךָ מִיָּדֶךָ׃ 12 כִּי תַעֲבֹד
אֶת־הָאֲדָמָה לֹא־תֹסֵף תֵּת־כֹּחָהּ לָךְ נָע
וָנָד תִּהְיֶה בָּאָרֶץ׃

OJPS the ground. [11]And now cursed art thou from the ground, which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother's blood from thy hand. [12]When thou tillest the ground, it shall not henceforth yield unto thee her strength; a fugitive and a wanderer shalt thou be in the earth."

RASHI **11 You shall be more cursed than the ground.** More than the ground was cursed in 3:17, for its earlier sin. **Which opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood.** Now it has sinned yet more, and I am adding on to it a further curse: "it shall no longer yield its strength to you" (v. 12).

12 You shall become a ceaseless wanderer on earth. You no longer have permission to dwell in one single spot.

KIMHI to blood as a single substance, while the plural refers to the four humors that are mingled in it. The midrash that takes the plural to refer to the blood of all Abel's possible descendants is based on the evident fact that neither Cain nor Abel had yet known their wives, or at least (if they had) their wives had not yet given birth.

11 Which opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. When the blood soaked into the soil: "Earth, do not cover my blood!" (Job 16:18); "For the blood she shed is still in her . . . She did not pour it out on the ground to cover it with earth" (Ezek. 24:7).

12 If you till the soil. Rather, "when" you till the soil (OJPS), which Cain in fact did, which is why he was cursed in this way. **It shall no longer yield its strength to you.** The soil had already been cursed when Adam sinned, but now, on account of Cain, the curse was ramped up. Even what the soil produced for Adam it would no longer produce, but less. It is not clear whether this curse was directed just at Cain; at Cain and his descendants; or against them all, including Seth and his descendants down to Noah. But since the curse is directed at "you" (in the singular), it would seem to mean Cain personally. In 3:17, it is the ground that is cursed, *because of* "you." **You shall become a ceaseless wanderer on earth.** This is a second curse, definitely directed against Cain alone. God would make him obsess over the first curse, thinking, "I will go somewhere else and farm there; perhaps in a different place the soil will yield its full strength to me." But he would think this same thing everywhere he went, his whole life long. However, God did not put him to death, as is supposed to be done to deliberate killers, in order not to leave the world uninhabited. Cain had not yet fathered children, nor would Adam do so for 130 years. But the Holy One did decree one of the punishments meted out to killers against him: that of exile. ("Ceaseless wanderer" is repetition for the sake of emphasis.) And of course it is not impossible that the killing was inadvertent. Cain might well not have known that what he did was sufficient to cause death. So exile, the punishment for one who kills inadvertently, was quite appropriate.

IBN EZRA the individual "bloods" of each of the sons Abel would potentially have had are all crying out.

11 Therefore, you shall be more cursed than the ground. Rather, you are cursed "from the ground" (OJPS). It will provide a much smaller yield than it had previously. Cain was always "a tiller of the soil" (v. 2), but it would no longer provide him with grain and fruit. He would have to go to a land far from that of his father Adam (who lived near the garden) and would never find peace and quiet in a single place, but would have to roam. **Which opened its mouth.** As in "Job *mouths* empty words" (Job 35:16). **[T]**

12 A ceaseless wanderer. Some take this to mean "a wailing wanderer," as that word is used in "They met together to go and *wail* with him and comfort him" (Job 2:11). But see how this word is used in "I would *flee* far off" (Ps. 55:8). In my opinion "a fugitive and a wanderer" of OJPS gives the sense correctly, for the two words here are really matched synonyms.

[T] "Empty words" are *hevel*—which is also the Hebrew for "Abel."

NAHMANIDES **11 You shall be more cursed than the ground.** Rashi's comment is incorrect. The ground was certainly not cursed here on his account as it had been on his father's. It is saying that he would be cursed "*from* the ground" (OJPS)—it would no longer yield its strength to him, and he would become a ceaseless wanderer over it. "No matter how hard or skillfully you work—plowing, hoeing, sowing just as you should—it will no longer yield its strength to you. You will sow much and reap little." This is the kind of curse meant to "turn your blessings into curses" (Mal. 2:2). Notice that the curse was directed specifically at Cain's own profession, he being "a tiller of the soil" (v. 2), exactly what was now cursed. **Which opened its mouth.** You killed your brother and covered up his blood in the ground. Now I decree that "the earth shall disclose its bloodshed and shall no longer conceal its slain" (Isa. 26:21). For you will be punished through it and everything you might cover up in it—whatever you sow or plant. — In fact, this is always the punishment for spilling blood on earth: "for blood pollutes the land" (Num. 35:33). Polluting the land results in cursing its produce: "if one came to a heap of twenty measures, it would yield only ten; and if one came to a wine vat to skim off fifty measures, the press would yield only twenty" (Hag. 2:16).

12 It shall no longer yield its strength to you. As it has done up to now when you would till it (see Ibn Ezra's comment to v. 11). But it could be that this is a *second* curse. The first, that of v. 11, would mean that vines and figs and fruit trees would not yield fruit on his property; this one would mean that even hard agricultural labor would not produce grain for him as it used to do. So both of these two curses would be directed against his profession. **You shall become a ceaseless wanderer on earth.** This would then be a third curse. His mind would not be at rest in any one particular spot; he must be an exile forever. Permanent exile is indeed the punishment for murder.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **9 Where is your brother Abel?** Where did you bury him? (Sforno).

12 You shall become a ceaseless wanderer on earth. Because the soil would not yield properly; farmers move from place to place looking for a location with a good yield (Bekhor Shor).

NJPS 13Cain said to the LORD, "My punishment is too great to bear! 14Since You have banished me this day from the soil, and I must avoid Your presence and become a restless wanderer on earth—anyone who meets me may kill me!" 15The LORD said to him, "I promise, if anyone kills Cain, sevenfold vengeance shall be taken on him." And the LORD put a mark on Cain,

13 וַיֹּ֥אמֶר קַ֖יִן אֶל־יְהוָ֑ה גָּד֥וֹל עֲוֹנִ֖י מִנְּשֹֽׂא׃
14 הֵן֩ גֵּרַ֨שְׁתָּ אֹתִ֜י הַיּ֣וֹם מֵעַ֣ל פְּנֵ֣י הָאֲדָמָ֗ה
וּמִפָּנֶ֙יךָ֙ אֶסָּתֵ֔ר וְהָיִ֥יתִי נָ֛ע וָנָ֖ד בָּאָ֑רֶץ וְהָיָ֕ה
כָּל־מֹצְאִ֖י יַהַרְגֵֽנִי׃ 15 וַיֹּ֤אמֶר לוֹ֙ יְהוָ֔ה לָכֵ֕ן
כָּל־הֹרֵ֥ג קַ֖יִן שִׁבְעָתַ֣יִם יֻקָּ֑ם וַיָּ֤שֶׂם יְהוָה֙

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ How could Cain say, "My punishment is too great to bear" (v. 13), when he actually deserved death? ✦ Why did the Lord promise "sevenfold" vengeance for killing Cain (v. 15) and not take sevenfold vengeance for the killing of Abel? ✦ Why did the Lord promise Cain that no one would kill him? ✦ What was the "mark" that the Lord put on Cain?

RASHI **13 My punishment is too great to bear!** Rather, "Is my transgression too great [for You] to bear, to forgive?" You bear the upper and lower worlds alike. Is it impossible for You to forgive my transgression?

15 I promise, if anyone kills Cain. The Hebrew literally says "Therefore" (OJPS). This is one of the biblical verses where the text is abridged, alluding to its meaning but not spelling it out. It is an unspoken threat: thus and so will be done to him (without specifying precisely what). **Sevenfold vengeance shall be taken on him.** This part of the verse is, therefore, a separate sentence, "Sevenfold vengeance shall be taken on Cain." But the word translated "sevenfold" really means "after seven." "I have no intention of taking vengeance on Cain just yet, but after seven generations I will indeed take My vengeance on him, when his descendant Lamech will arise and kill him." The "vengeance" in this phrase is to be taken against Cain, on Abel's behalf. So the first phrase is obviously an unspoken threat against anyone who might harm Cain. (The difficult language in 2 Sam. 5:8 is to be explained similarly; that verse leaves the promise that "those who attack the Jebusites" shall be rewarded unspoken. Compare 1 Chron. 11:6, where the promise is added in.) **The LORD put a mark on Cain.** Not "a mark," but "a letter." He carved a letter of His name into his forehead.

KIMHI **13 My punishment is too great to bear!** He was not repentant, just arguing for a lighter sentence.

14 Since You have banished me this day from the soil. From "the land" (OJPS) of Eden, close by the garden, where he and his father and mother had been up to that point (see my comments to 3:23–34). **I must avoid Your presence.** I will be hidden from Your face (compare OJPS), just as You have hidden Your face from me, removing Your protection from me in Your anger and leaving me at the mercy of all the carnivorous animals.

15 If anyone kills Cain, sevenfold vengeance shall be taken on him. That is, multiple vengeance will be taken on anyone who kills Cain, man or beast. — "Seven" simply means "manifold," as in "I will go on smiting you sevenfold for your sins" (Lev. 26:21). Our word actually uses the Hebrew dual ending: "double sevenfold." This of

NAHMANIDES **13 My punishment is too great to bear!** See Rashi's comment, which comes from Genesis Rabbah. In fact, Cain is confessing. "It's true! My sin is too great to be forgiven! For 'You are righteous, O LORD; Your rulings are just' [Ps. 119:137], even though You have punished me so severely."

14 You have banished me this day from the soil. Since I am to be "a ceaseless wanderer," never staying in one place, I am banished from the soil. There is no place for me to rest. **I must avoid Your presence.** I can no longer stand before You to pray or bring offerings; "I am ashamed and humiliated, for I bear the disgrace of my youth" (Jer. 31:19). But what can I do? For **anyone who meets me may kill me!** Though You, in Your great mercy, did not condemn me to death. — Cain is, therefore, admitting his great guilt and accepting his punishment, but begging to be protected from a punishment greater than he was given. "As a wanderer, I cannot build a house with walls to protect me, so even wild animals may kill me, for Your protection has departed from me." He admits that man is not so superior that he can escape danger by his own power; he must be protected from on high.

15 The LORD put a mark on Cain. He did not "give" him a mark, or "make" him one, but "put" it—permanently. But it was probably not a "mark on" Cain but a "sign for" him (OJPS). It would serve as a signal for him, when he moved from place to place, to tell him where he must go. This would reassure him that nothing would happen to him on that route. According to Genesis Rabbah, the Lord gave him a dog. He was afraid of being killed by an animal, so the Holy One gave him an animal to defend him and lead him around. (Thus the

OJPS 13And Cain said unto the LORD: "My punishment is greater than I can bear. 14Behold, Thou hast driven me out this day from the face of the land; and from Thy face shall I be hid; and I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer in the earth; and it will come to pass, that whosoever findeth me will slay me." 15And the LORD said unto him: "Therefore whosoever slayeth Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold." And the LORD set a sign for Cain,

RASHBAM **15 If anyone kills Cain, sevenfold vengeance shall be taken on him.** "Seven" is not meant to be precise; it means "multiple," much more than he

IBN EZRA **13 My punishment is too great to bear!** All the commentators agree that he is really confessing and saying, "My sin is too great to be forgiven!" The Hebrew words of our verse are used this way in "forgiving iniquity" (Exod. 34:7). But the translations are correct. There are numerous Hebrew words that mean both an action and the reward or punishment one gets from that action. Our word is used that way also in "the *punishment* of the Amorites is not yet complete" (15:16); "you won't get into *trouble* over this" (1 Sam. 28:10). What Cain says in the very next verse conclusively demonstrates that this is the correct interpretation.

14 I must avoid Your presence. Certainly "His presence fills all the earth!" (Isa. 6:3). But there are places of power where God's might appears.

15 Sevenfold. That is, for seven generations. The Hebrew word sounds like a dual form of "seven," which you might think means 14. It doesn't. (It doesn't mean 343 either.) The proof is found in Isa. 30:26, where the prophet says "the light of the sun shall become *sevenfold*" and goes on to clarify that this means "like the light of the *seven* days." **Vengeance shall be taken on him.** What our verse is really saying is, "No one shall kill Cain—vengeance shall not be taken on him for seven generations." You needn't wonder how he could live for all those years; remember that Adam's son Seth actually lived well into the lifetime of Noah,

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **14 Anyone who meets me may kill me!** Rather—since Nahmanides is right about v. 13—Cain is saying, "Let anyone who finds me kill me." It is a prayer (Abarbanel).

15 Sevenfold. Rather, "fourteen-fold"—this form carries the dual ending (Sforno). **The LORD put a mark on Cain.** Whatever this mark was, it was enough to convince Cain (Gersonides). The dog (of the midrash cited by Nahmanides) makes the most sense, especially if it was Abel's sheepdog (Abarbanel).

NJPS lest anyone who met him should kill him. 16Cain left the presence of the LORD and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden.

17Cain knew his wife, and she conceived and bore Enoch. And he then founded a city, and named the city after his son Enoch. 18To Enoch was born Irad, and Irad begot Mehujael, and Mehujael begot Methusael, and Methusael begot Lamech.

לְקַיִן אֹות לְבִלְתִּי הַכּות־אֹתו כָּל־מֹצְאֹו׃
16 וַיֵּצֵא קַיִן מִלִּפְנֵי יְהוָה וַיֵּשֶׁב בְּאֶרֶץ־נֹוד
קִדְמַת־עֵדֶן׃
17 וַיֵּדַע קַיִן אֶת־אִשְׁתֹּו וַתַּהַר וַתֵּלֶד אֶת־
חֲנֹוךְ וַיְהִי בֹּנֶה עִיר וַיִּקְרָא שֵׁם הָעִיר
כְּשֵׁם בְּנֹו חֲנֹוךְ׃ 18 וַיִּוָּלֶד לַחֲנוֹךְ אֶת־עִירָד
וְעִירָד יָלַד אֶת־מְחוּיָאֵל וּמְחִיָּאֵל יָלַד
אֶת־מְתוּשָׁאֵל וּמְתוּשָׁאֵל יָלַד אֶת־לָמֶךְ׃

OJPS lest any finding him should smite him. 16And Cain went out from the presence of the LORD, and dwelt in the land of Nod, on the east of Eden.

17And Cain knew his wife; and she conceived, and bore Enoch; and he builded a city, and called the name of the city after the name of his son Enoch. 18And unto Enoch was born Irad; and Irad begot Mehujael; and Mehujael begot Methushael; and Methushael begot Lamech.

RASHI **16 Cain left the presence of the LORD.** Submissively, pretending to be humbled. **In the land of Nod.** "Nod" is related to "wanderer" of v. 14; this is the land where all exiles wander. Another reading: no matter what land he went to, the earth would shake beneath his feet—in this reading it is literally the land that moves back and forth—and people would say, "Get away from him! That is the one who murdered his brother." **East of Eden.** That is where his father had been exiled when he was kicked out of the garden. Since that is where the "ever-turning sword" (3:24) was stationed, it is evident that Adam was expelled in that direction. We find that murderers are always sent east: "Moses set aside three cities on the east side of the Jordan" (Deut. 4:41).

17 He then founded a city, and named the city after his son Enoch. Implicitly, the city was named in Enoch's memory.

18 Begot. Sometimes this is expressed by the causative Hiphil form *holid*; sometimes, as here, by the simple Qal form *yalad*, which elsewhere means "give birth." The basic meaning of the Hebrew verb is "to generate." In the Hiphil it means that a male is causing the female to generate a child; in the Qal, that the male is generating a child by means of his seed.

RASHBAM harmed his brother. Compare "the light of the sun shall become sevenfold" (Isa. 30:26); "seven times the righteous man falls and gets up" (Prov. 24:16).

IBN EZRA his great-great-great-great-great-great-great-grandson. It could also be that Cain's descendants were called "Cain," just as Jacob/Israel's descendants are called "Israel." **The LORD put a mark on Cain.** Some say this was a horn; others, that He emboldened him and made him fearless. What I think is that the Holy One performed "a sign" (OJPS) to make Cain believe His words. The text just does not tell us what it was.

16 The land of Nod. It acquired this name—"Wanderland"—from Cain, who was cursed to be "a ceaseless *wanderer*" (v. 12). **East of Eden.** More precisely, "on the east of Eden" (OJPS)—in its eastern part, but north of the garden.

17 And he then founded a city, and named the city after his son Enoch. Just as Samaria was named "after Shemer, the owner of the hill" (1 Kings 16:24). Even Egypt got its Hebrew name from Ham's son Mizraim. **[U]**

18 To Enoch was born Irad, and Irad begot Mehujael, and Mehujael begot Methusael, and Methusael begot Lamech. Lamech is therefore the sixth generation from Cain and the seventh from Adam.

[U] See 10:6.

KIMHI course increases the emphasis still more. Multiple vengeance of this kind implies many bouts with illness before actual death comes.

16 Cain left the presence of the LORD. The place near the garden, which was a place of prophecy, where the Shekhinah was to be found and the Holy Spirit spoke with Adam and Eve and their children. **And settled in the land of Nod.** Even once he was based here he would still wander around from time to time, for his punishment was meant to last his life long. But he kept returning here, for his wife and children were settled here permanently. But he called it "the land of Nod" ("wandering") because that is what it was from his perspective.

17 He then founded a city, and named the city after his son Enoch. Who was born while he "was building" the city, as the Hebrew literally says.

18 Mehujael . . . Mehujael. The second occurrence is actually spelled Mehijael in Hebrew with an extra, silent *yud*. Compare "Irijah" in Jer. 37:13. Though our chapter does not say so, all these names were meant to commemorate some particular incident or other. That was the custom in the early generations. Sometimes the reason for the name is given, other times not. But the midrash explains these particular names.

NAHMANIDES Sages describe a "sign" of the insulting kind that he deserved.) In any case, the Hebrew verb ("set" or "put") implies that this sign was a permanent one.

16 Cain left the presence of the LORD. For good. He never again stood before Him: "I must avoid Your presence" (v. 14). **And settled in the land of Nod.** He did not go everywhere on earth, but "settled" in the land of Nod ("wandering"), always wandering and never resting anywhere. The land got its name from his wandering.

17 He then founded a city, and named the city after his son Enoch. He had expected that his punishment would include being childless. Once his son was born, he began to build a city so that the son, at least, could settle there. Since he was cursed and nothing of his could succeed, he named the city after Enoch to make clear that he was not building it for himself. As a wanderer, he could have no permanent location, but his son could. It was as if Enoch built it for himself. But notice that he did not "build" the city (as, e.g., in 10:11 and Num. 32:34) but rather "was building" it. Indeed, he spent his entire life working on the city, for all his actions were cursed. He would build a little, toiling and struggling, and then wander off; then he would return and build a little more, never with much success. Cain's story is told here to show you how long-suffering the Holy One is, and how long He put up with Cain, who begot children and grandchildren. But He "visits the guilt of the parents upon the children" (Exod. 20:5), and eventually Cain's line was cut off. Tradition says he did not die peacefully, but in the Flood, watching all his descendants die with him. He had most likely produced only six generations up to the time of the Flood, when Seth had already produced two more. **[K]** (Or perhaps Cain did have as many generations as Seth but the text did not bother to count them.) Even the ones who are listed are just those who built cities or originated various professions. Note that the point of v. 23 is that Lamech's sons were killed off before they themselves produced children.

[K] Contrast vv. 17–22 to 5:6–28.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **16 The land of Nod.** This land is mentioned nowhere else in the Bible (Masorah).

NJPS [19]Lamech took to himself two wives: the name of the one was Adah, and the name of the other was Zillah. [20]Adah bore Jabal; he was the ancestor of those who dwell in tents and amidst herds. [21]And the name of his brother was Jubal; he was the ancestor of all who play the lyre and the pipe. [22]As for Zillah, she bore Tubal-cain, who forged all implements of copper and iron. And the sister of Tubal-cain was Naamah.

חמישי

19 וַיִּקַּח־לוֹ לֶמֶךְ שְׁתֵּי נָשִׁים שֵׁם הָאַחַת
עָדָה וְשֵׁם הַשֵּׁנִית צִלָּה׃ 20 וַתֵּלֶד עָדָה
אֶת־יָבָל הוּא הָיָה אֲבִי יֹשֵׁב אֹהֶל וּמִקְנֶה׃
21 וְשֵׁם אָחִיו יוּבָל הוּא הָיָה אֲבִי כָּל־
תֹּפֵשׂ כִּנּוֹר וְעוּגָב׃ 22 וְצִלָּה גַם־הִוא יָלְדָה
אֶת־תּוּבַל קַיִן לֹטֵשׁ כָּל־חֹרֵשׁ נְחֹשֶׁת
וּבַרְזֶל וַאֲחוֹת תּוּבַל־קָיִן נַעֲמָה׃

OJPS [19]And Lamech took unto him two wives; the name of one was Adah, and the name of the other Zillah. [20]And Adah bore Jabal; he was the father of such as dwell in tents and have cattle. [21]And his brother's name was Jubal; he was the father of all such as handle the harp and pipe. [22]And Zillah, she also bore Tubal-cain, the forger of every cutting instrument of brass and iron; and the sister of Tubal-cain was Naamah.

RASHI **19 Lamech took to himself.** The only reason we are told all this is to assure us that the Holy One did eventually keep the promise he made in v. 15. Once Lamech had begotten offspring, the seventh generation had come into existence, and that is when Lamech killed Cain, as he explains in v. 23. **Two wives.** This was the custom of the generation of the Flood: one wife for procreation and one for sex. The one who was for sex would be given an infertility drug. They would ornament her like a bride and feed her delicacies. The other wife would be ostracized and would mourn like a widow. This is the background to "May he consort with a barren woman who bears no child, leave his widow deprived of good" (Job 24:21). **[P] Adah.** This was the wife used for procreation; the name implies that he found her disgusting and put her aside (in Aramaic this root is used to translate the Hebrew verb "to turn aside"). **Zillah.** This was the wife he used for sex; she was always in "his shadow" (*ẓillo*). All this is midrash from Genesis Rabbah.

20 The ancestor of those who dwell in tents and amidst herds. He was the first to take herds out into the wilderness for pasture. Tent dwellers of this kind spend a month here and a month there, all for the sake of pasturing their animals. When the pasturage is used up in one location, they go and pitch their tents in another one. But the midrash interprets this verse to mean that he built temples for idolatry. This is based on the wording of "the infuriating image that provokes fury" (Ezek. 8:3), where "provokes" is spelled exactly like "herds" of our verse. His brother Jubal is similarly understood to be playing "the lyre and the pipe" (v. 21) as part of idolatrous worship.

22 Tubal-cain. Literally, "Cain-spicer." He "spiced up" and greatly developed Cain's own profession—fashioning weapons for murderers. **Who forged all implements of copper and iron.** Rather, "he was a forger, [that is] a sharpener, of copper and iron." The

[P] Our editions of Rashi say this is discussed in Tractate Sanhedrin; in our texts we do not find it there but in Genesis Rabbah.

KIMHI **19 Lamech took to himself two wives.** Apparently this was not the custom originally, and Lamech was the first to do it. This is why they were quarreling, and this is why he had to threaten them (in v. 23).

20 Those who dwell in tents and amidst herds. Jabal was the first who took his animals into the wilderness and lived there in a tent; those before him who raised animals kept them near their city.

21 Jubal . . . was the ancestor of all who play the lyre and the pipe. The Hebrew literally says "of all such as *handle* the harp and pipe" (OJPS), referring specifically to the fingering of these instruments, with the left hand.

22 As for Zillah. Zillah "also" (OJPS) had a child who had an intense desire to practice a particular craft. Both these women may have had other children, but these are mentioned because each of them brought something new into the world. **Tubal-cain.** His name may originally have been Tubal, "-cain" being added when the original Cain died, in his memory. **Who forged all implements of copper and iron.** But he was not "the ancestor" of all who later did this, perhaps because he was not the very first to work with copper

NAHMANIDES **22 Who forged all implements of copper and iron.** Rather, "who forged and implemented [or "cut"; see OJPS] all kinds of copper and iron." For the syntax, compare "Forgive all guilt and accept what is good" (Hosea 14:3), where in the Hebrew "all" similarly appears out of place. According to Onkelos, he (like Jabal and Jubal of vv. 20–21) was "the ancestor of" those who follow this profession. **And the sister of Tubal-cain was Naamah.** For other women who are listed in similar contexts as "sisters," see 36:22, Num. 26:59, and 1 Chron. 7:15. According to Genesis Rabbah, some think she became Noah's wife. Why was she called Naamah? Because

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **20 Jabal.** This name appears nowhere else in the Bible (Masorah). Notice that Lamech's wives named their sons after Cain and Abel. But the *b-l* element in the names of all three also alludes to the word for "waste," since they would all be wasted in the *mabul*, the Flood (Abarbanel). **He was the ancestor of those who dwell in tents and amidst herds.** Lamech taught his three sons these trades because they could not support themselves by farming due to the curse of Cain (Bekhor Shor). Through this, what Cain had cost the human race by killing Abel was restored (Gersonides).

21 And the name of his brother was Jubal; he was the ancestor of all who play the lyre and the pipe. Notice that it does not say that "she conceived and bore" him; obviously they were twin brothers. It is quite normal, of course, for shepherds to "play the pipe" (Hizkuni).

RASHBAM **20 Those who dwell in tents and amidst herds.** Shepherds. **[K]**

[K] See Rashbam's comments to 13:5 and 25:27.

IBN EZRA **19 The name of the one was Adah, and the name of the other was Zillah.** Don't pay any attention to what Saadia says about the meanings of names. Even if we knew the entire Hebrew language of those days, we couldn't possibly know everything that happened to everyone. The only way to know why someone was given a name is when the Torah itself tells us, as it does for (e.g.) Moses and Issachar.

20 The ancestor. Literally "the father," but that word (in all its different forms) is used to mean "the first," the master. In our verse, the vowel under the א shows that *avi* is not "my father" but "father of." As we see from *aḥi*, in this respect, the word "brother" is a brother to "father."

21 The ancestor. [V] The lyre and the pipe. This took great skill and scientific knowledge.

22 Who forged all implements of copper and iron. Rather, "who *sharpened*" them, as in "So all the Israelites had to go down to the Philistines to have their plowshares, their mattocks, axes, and colters *sharpened*" (1 Sam. 13:20). It is understood that Tubal-cain was likewise the "ancestor"

[V] See Ibn Ezra's comment to 45:8.

NJPS [23]And Lamech said to his wives,
"Adah and Zillah, hear my voice;
O wives of Lamech, give ear to my speech.
I have slain a man for wounding me,
And a lad for bruising me.

OJPS [23]And Lamech said unto his wives:
Adah and Zillah, hear my voice;
ye wives of Lamech, hearken unto my speech;
for I have slain a man for wounding me,
and a young man for bruising me;

[23] וַיֹּאמֶר לֶמֶךְ לְנָשָׁיו
עָדָה וְצִלָּה שְׁמַעַן קוֹלִי
נְשֵׁי לֶמֶךְ הַאְזֵנָּה אִמְרָתִי
כִּי אִישׁ הָרַגְתִּי לְפִצְעִי
וְיֶלֶד לְחַבֻּרָתִי׃

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Lamech told his wives, "I have slain a man for wounding me, and a lad for bruising me" (v. 23). Who were this man and this lad?

RASHI verb is not past tense (according to the vowel points), but a participle, indicating his profession: he was a "sharpener," one who sharpened and polished copper and iron tools of all kinds: "My foe *stabs* me with his eyes" (Job 16:9). **Naamah.** She was Noah's wife.

23 Hear my voice. He had to call out to them because they were separated from him, having refused to sleep with him because he had killed Cain and his own son Tubal-cain. For Lamech was blind and had to be led around by Tubal-cain. Tubal-cain saw Cain, but he looked like an animal to him, so he told his father to shoot an arrow at him, and he killed him. Once Lamech realized that he had actually slain his ancestor Cain, he slapped his hands together, accidentally striking Tubal-cain between them, and killed him too. Lamech's wives left him, so now he was trying to appease them. "Hear my voice" means "heed me," that is, sleep with me. **I have slain a man for wounding me.** Rather, "have I slain this man for my wound?" Do you think I did it deliberately, so that the wound I gave him should be called mine, attributed to me? **And a lad for bruising me.** Similarly, "for my bruise." Should the bruise I gave this lad be attributed to me? I did both of these things accidentally, not deliberately. This is not "my" wound or "my" bruise. — "Wound"

RASHBAM **23 And Lamech said to his wives.** He spoke to them because they were quarreling with him, as always happens when one man has two wives; compare Jacob with Rachel and Leah (see 30:2) and Elkanah with Hannah and Peninnah (see 1 Sam. 1:6–8). **I have slain a man for wounding me and a lad for bruising me.** Rather: Why are you yelling at me? "Have I slain a man, that I should be wounded for it, or a lad, that I should be bruised for it?"

IBN EZRA of all such. **Naamah.** Perhaps she is mentioned because she married one of Noah's sons and survived the flood.

23 Lamech said to his wives. He had said this earlier, before they bore their children. I have already shown you two examples of this, in 1:9 and 2:9; see also 24:22, Exod. 33:5, and Deut. 3:23. He said this to them because they refused to have sex with him, being afraid to have children. Those children would be the seventh generation from Cain, so they presumed they would be killed (or die in some way). **Adah and Zillah, hear my voice; O wives of Lamech, give ear to my speech.** Note the parallelism (as also in what follows). **I have slain a man for wounding me, and a lad for bruising me.** Rather, since this is poetic language, "I would slay a [grown] man for wounding me, or even a lad for bruising me"—for it is I who am in truth the seventh generation. (But he was counting from Adam.) For past tense verbs used with a future sense, see "*Let me pay* the price of the land" (23:13), "which I *shall wrest* from the Amorites" (48:22), and many others.

KIMHI and iron but the one who perfected the technique. **And the sister of Tubal-cain was Naamah.** But he had no brother as did Jabal. This entire passage tells us that the various crafts were not part of the original nature of humanity; each individual has a particular kind of intelligence and skill that interests him as he matures. He can learn this trade more quickly than any other—each according to his nature and to how he applies himself.

23 I have slain a man for wounding me, and a lad for bruising me. It may be that his two wives were quarreling because they were jealous, as two women married to the same man would naturally be (remember that he was the first to marry two wives). In this case, Lamech would be warning them: I've killed a man and I can kill you, for nothing will happen to me if I do. I am ten times less worthy of punishment than Cain. But there is an alternative to the translation "wounding me" and "bruising me"; he might be saying, "I have slain a man by my wound [the wound that I gave him], and a lad by my bruise." The question is whether the possessive suffix is meant to be understood as a subjective

NAHMANIDES everything she did was sweet and pleasant (*na'im*). The point of this midrash is that she was well known in her time as a righteous woman who produced righteous children; this is why the text mentions her. If that is so, then Cain does have some slight remnant on earth. Certainly if she was not the woman who bore Noah's three sons there would be no obvious reason to mention her. Another midrash says that she was the woman alluded to in 6:2 who led the "divine beings" astray (see Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer). Still others say that she became the wife of Shamdon and the mother of Ashmedai and therefore the ancestress of all the demons. Indeed, her name is found in manuals for summoning demons. The text alludes tersely to secrets of this kind.

23 Lamech said to his wives. This episode of Lamech and his wives is not clarified in the text (and see my comment to v. 24 as well). What we can say is that they were afraid that Lamech would be killed as punishment for his ancestor's sin. For the Holy One did not forgive Cain; He merely promised that he would not be killed. The debt would be collected from his descendants, but they did not know when. That is indeed what happened. Lamech reassured them that the Holy One would be even more merciful toward him, since he was more innocent than Cain. He would pray to God, and God would certainly heed his prayer. What I think is that Lamech was an extremely clever and capable man who taught his three sons the three trades mentioned in vv. 20–22. But his wives were afraid he would be punished for having produced tools of "copper and iron"—that is, having brought weapons and war into the world. He, of course, was merely following his family profession, being a descendant of the first murderer, who "created the instruments of havoc" (Isa. 54:16). **I have slain a man for wounding me, and a lad for bruising me.** Rather, "Have I slain a man for wounding me, or a young man for bruising me, as did Cain? No! God will protect me from killing even more than He protected Cain." Even without a sword or spear, a man

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **23 I have slain a man for wounding me.** We are told this to show how little fear of the Lord Lamech had. If he had indeed repented, he would undoubtedly have been saved from the evil that was in store for him (Gersonides). Lamech's statements are tremendously obscure; they are impossible to explain without resorting to midrash (Abarbanel). **Seth.** Adam's three sons represent the three aspects of human life: animal (Cain), social (Abel), and rational (Seth). Noah's three sons are the same, as I will explain later (Abarbanel).

NJPS [24]If Cain is avenged sevenfold,
Then Lamech seventy-sevenfold."

[25]Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and named him Seth, meaning, "God has provided me with another offspring in place of Abel," for Cain had killed him. [26]And to Seth, in turn, a son was born, and he named him Enosh. It was then that men began to invoke the LORD by name.

OJPS [24]If Cain shall be avenged sevenfold,
truly Lamech seventy and sevenfold.

[25]And Adam knew his wife again; and she bore a son, and called his name Seth: "for God hath appointed me another seed instead of Abel; for Cain slew him." [26]And to Seth, to him also there was born a son; and he called his name Enosh; then began men to call upon the name of the LORD.

כִּי שִׁבְעָתַיִם יֻקַּם־קָיִן
וְלֶמֶךְ שִׁבְעִים וְשִׁבְעָה׃ 24

וַיֵּדַע אָדָם עוֹד אֶת־אִשְׁתּוֹ וַתֵּלֶד בֵּן 25
וַתִּקְרָא אֶת־שְׁמוֹ שֵׁת כִּי שָׁת־לִי אֱלֹהִים
זֶרַע אַחֵר תַּחַת הֶבֶל כִּי הָרָגוֹ קָיִן׃
וּלְשֵׁת גַּם־הוּא יֻלַּד־בֵּן וַיִּקְרָא אֶת־שְׁמוֹ 26
אֱנוֹשׁ אָז הוּחַל לִקְרֹא בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה׃ פ

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ If Lamech's question was rhetorical, as some take it, what is the point of v. 24?

RASHI implies an injury caused by a sword or an arrow. But see the second paragraph of the next comment.

24 If Cain is avenged sevenfold, then Lamech seventy-sevenfold. If Cain, who killed deliberately, did not suffer vengeance for seven generations, then shouldn't I, who killed by accident, not suffer vengeance for multiple sevens?

All this about Lamech killing Cain and Tubal-cain is from the Tanhuma. But according to Genesis Rabbah, Lamech did not kill anyone; his wives separated from him once they had fulfilled the obligation to have children. Since the decree had been issued to destroy the descendants of Cain after seven generations, they thought: What point is there for us to "bear children for terror" (Isa. 65:23)? The Flood that is coming will wash everything away. He said to them, "Was it I who killed Abel"—who was a full-grown "man" when he was killed, though still "a lad" in age—"so that *my* offspring should be destroyed for that sin? Cain, who actually did kill him, had his punishment delayed for seven generations! Let them delay punishing me—who did not kill anyone—for seventy-seven." But this is a stupid argument. If the Holy One had waited another 70 generations, He would never have collected His due, nor kept His word.

25 Adam knew his wife again. Lamech came to Adam to complain about his wives. Adam said to them, "Is it your job to be so picky about the decrees of the Holy One? You do your job and let Him do His." They replied, "You first! Haven't you separated yourself from your wife for 130 years, ever since humanity was punished with death because of you?" **[Q]** At once, "Adam knew his wife again." But according to Genesis Rabbah, the Hebrew word here implies not "again" but "even more." Even more desire was added to the desire that he already had.

26 It was then that men began to invoke the LORD by name. Rather, "it was then that men began to call things"—other people, and idols—"by the name of the Lord,"

[Q] See Rashi's comment to 5:3.

RASHBAM **24 If Cain is avenged sevenfold, then Lamech seventy-sevenfold.** Again, these numbers are not meant to be taken literally. But they are the point of including this episode: we are being informed that even many generations later everyone still remembered that Cain was not to be attacked.

26 It was then that men began to invoke the LORD by name. They began

IBN EZRA **24 If Cain is avenged sevenfold, then Lamech seventy-sevenfold.** Cain killed someone with malice aforethought. I did not. He was really saying to them, "You see? It is the seventh generation and nothing has happened. The decree against Cain's descendants has been annulled." But actually Lamech's sons and all his descendants were killed in the Flood. The violence that Cain had wreaked against his brother eventually left him with no one to carry on his name.

25 In place of Abel. Seth would carry on Abel's line. **Cain had killed him.** Rather, "He [God] killed him—Cain." This demonstrates God's justice. No matter how patient He was, He did at last punish him: "He does not remit all punishment, but visits the iniquity of parents upon children and children's children, upon the third and fourth generations" (Exod. 34:7).

26 It was then that men began to invoke the LORD by name. That is, they

KIMHI genitive or an objective genitive. A wound is one that draws blood, a bruise one that does not. A bruise would not kill a grown man, but it might kill a boy.

24 If Cain is avenged sevenfold, then Lamech seventy-sevenfold. See the previous comment. We learn from this story that originally people had faith in God's providence—that He would reward the good and punish the bad—but that He might be more patient with one person than with another.

25 Adam knew his wife again. After 130 years (see 5:3). During those 130 years he separated from his wife (because of the punishment she had brought on him) and therefore had no children. **For Cain had killed him.** And he died childless. Now God has compensated me with another son, who *will* have children. — As he indeed did; see v. 26. But no further descendants are mentioned in the line of Lamech, since they were all wiped out in the Flood.

26 To Seth, in turn, a son was born. To Seth "also" (OJPS), a son was born just as he had been born to Eve, "in his likeness after

NAHMANIDES can cause a wound that would be worse than anything a sword could do. Swords do not kill people. So those who make them have committed no sin.

24 If Cain is avenged sevenfold. The commentators, following Onkelos, explain this to mean that vengeance would be taken on Cain in the seventh generation. (Or they understand it as does the foolish midrash that Rashi mentions.) So Lamech's wives were afraid to have children, since they would be the seventh generation from Cain. Lamech assured his wives that he had prayed to God and that He would take pity on them and wait 77 generations more. But if that is what it means, 4:15 is missing a preposition; it should say not "seven times" but "*for* seven times," meaning that Cain would be avenged after seven generations and not in his own time. That is indeed how Onkelos translates it. But then vv. 23–24 should have occurred much earlier. In my opinion, the translations are correct: "seven*fold*," not seven generations. That is how the word is used in Ps. 12:7, Prov. 6:31, and Isa. 30:26. The Holy One was saying, "I will punish anyone who kills Cain sevenfold for his sin. Because Cain feared me and confessed to me, I promised him he would not be killed."

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **25 She . . . named him.** The phrase occurs nine more times in the Bible, five of them in ch. 30 (Masorah).

26 It was then that men began to invoke the LORD by name. Rather, they began to include the name of God *in* their names, by ending them with *–el* (Bekhor Shor). They cannot have just begun to invoke the Lord, who was known to Adam, Cain, and Abel;

NJPS 5 This is the record of Adam's line.—When God created man, He made him in the likeness of God; 2male and female He created them. And when they were created, He blessed them and called

RASHI turning them into objects of false worship, as if they were gods. **[R]**

5:1 This is the record of Adam's line. The Hebrew word does not mean "book" (OJPS) here, but "count" or "accounting." This is the account of the generations of Adam. (Again, there are many midrashim based on this phrase.) **When God created man.** Literally, on "the day" that God created man. Since "the record of Adam's line" begins on the very day that God created man, this tells us that Adam begat children on the very day he was created.

[R] Some texts of Rashi have a phrase suggesting the following interpretation: "Not 'began' but 'profaned'—they called idols by the name of the Lord."

ששי

ה זֶה סֵפֶר תּוֹלְדֹת אָדָם בְּיוֹם בָּרֹא
אֱלֹהִים אָדָם בִּדְמוּת אֱלֹהִים עָשָׂה אֹתוֹ׃
2 זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה בְּרָאָם וַיְבָרֶךְ אֹתָם וַיִּקְרָא

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ How can v. 1 say, "This is the book of the generations of Adam" (as OJPS more literally translates), when this is not the beginning of the book? Why doesn't this chapter start with "These are the generations of Adam," as 6:9 says of Noah? ✦ How can all these generations be part of "the day" (OJPS) that God created man? ✦ What do "He made him in the likeness of God" (v. 1) and "male and female He created them" and "He blessed them and called them Man" (both v. 2), which we have already been told in 1:27, have to do with this list of the succeeding generations? ✦ Why repeat yet once more that this happened "when they were created"?

OJPS 5 This is the book of the generations of Adam. In the day that God created man, in the likeness of God made He him; 2male and female created He them, and blessed them, and called their name Adam, in the day when they were

RASHBAM praying to Him because of the troubles they were beginning to have. This would seem to me to be the straightforward sense of the text.

IBN EZRA began to pray to him. "Began" is a geminate verb. A verb with exactly the same root letters means "to profane," and it is used in the expression "to profane the name of the Lord"—but the syntax of our verse shows that this cannot be the meaning here.

5:1 This is the record of Adam's line. Literally, of "the generations" (OJPS) fathered by Adam. He alone was not "generated" by a father and a mother, but was made **in the likeness of God.**

2 Male and female He created them. Either alone could obviously not reproduce.

KIMHI his image" (5:3), just as he had been to Adam. **It was then that men began to invoke the LORD by name.** Until then, they thought that prayer was pointless. They had presumed that everything was predetermined. Whatever had been decreed would stay decreed, and that was that. Now they began to pray to the Lord when they were in distress, or simply to satisfy their needs. But there is another possible meaning of the verb (and indeed there are two different versions of Onkelos here, one for each): that they "secularized" or "profaned" invoking the Lord by name—that is, they turned to idolatry, calling various stars and constellations by the name "Lord." They took them to be intermediaries between the Creator God and His creatures, controllers of the lower world. Some chose to worship the sun, others the moon, still others this star or that. They made images to represent them, and eventually this worship "of wood and stone, that cannot see or hear or eat or smell" (Deut. 4:28) spread throughout the world.

5:1 This is the record of Adam's line. Abel left no "generations" (OJPS) and Cain's perished, so they are not mentioned either; the generations through which human life continued were those of Seth. **When God created man, He made him in the likeness of God.** He was originally created like an angel, with a higher soul, but . . .

2 Male and female He created them. The serpent duped the female; the female duped the male; and he violated God's commandments. **He blessed them.** With the blessing of 1:28. But since He gave them the ability to master the earth, they certainly ought to have been able to master themselves. **And called them Man.** "On the day they were created" (see OJPS) really comes here, at the end of the verse. He called them Man before they were created (see 1:26). They were created to be human, not animals. The female too is

NAHMANIDES **5:1 This is the record of Adam's line.** His descendants, who follow in the rest of the chapter. But in my opinion this phrase also alludes to the entire rest of the Torah. Notice that it does not use the standard Genesis phrase, e.g., "This is the line of Ishmael" (25:12) or "This is the story of Isaac" (25:19; "story" here is the same Hebrew word as "line" in 25:12). That phrase is a plural, more literally translated as "*these* are the *descendants*"; our phrase says "*this* is the *book* [OJPS] of Adam's descendants." But see further my comment to "and called them Man" (v. 2). **When God created man.** The record begins with Adam himself and a reminder that he was created out of nothing. **He made him in the likeness of God.** He was made both by God and in the likeness of God.

2 Male and female He created them. Adam's wife was created at the same time. **He blessed them.** He gave them the power to reproduce, creating ongoing blessing for themselves in the form of many, many sons and daughters. Remember that they themselves were created, not born; so the ability to reproduce was a divine blessing. **And called them Man.** The Hebrew *adam* is a general name for the human species as a whole, which existed *in potentia* in the original couple, who were thus given this name. So v. 1 really begins, "This is the record of the line of humankind." According to Sherira Gaon, the Sages transmitted the identification of the countenance and the order of the lines **[L]** from one to another—some of them based on v. 1 here and some on v. 2. But such hidden secrets of the Torah are not passed along except to those who show signs of being worthy of it. And we have not been privileged to get them.

[L] The countenance and the palm lines of the mystical Primordial Adam.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS moreover, they were already now clearly on the downward path, since Noah was the only righteous person in his generation. What happened was that they began to call by the name of the Lord things that were not divine at all. Their original intention was undoubtedly to draw closer to the Lord by means of these intermediaries (Gersonides). The righteous ones began to preach to the masses in the name of the Lord to refute the idolatrous opinions that were starting to take hold then (Sforno).

5:1 This is the record of Adam's line. Literally, of "the generations of Adam" (OJPS); up to this point, as indicated in 2:4, we have been reading about "the generations of the heaven and of the earth." The "record" is really, etymologically, the "story." But from this point on we are literally discussing "generations." You will note that from here on the text mentions not "the man" (*ha-adam*) but "Adam" the proper name (Abarbanel). The story of the human race (Sforno).

2 When they were created. This form is also found only in 2:4, though there it has a preposition (Masorah). **And called them Man.** On "the day" (OJPS) when they were created, he called them Man: they were created not as infants or children, but fully grown, at approximately age 20 (Abarbanel).

NJPS them Man.—[3]When Adam had lived 130 years, he begot a son in his likeness after his image, and he named him Seth. [4]After the birth of Seth, Adam lived 800

OJPS created. [3]And Adam lived a hundred and thirty years, and begot a son in his own likeness, after his image; and called his name Seth. [4]And the days of Adam after he begot Seth were eight hundred

אֶת־שְׁמָם אָדָם בְּיוֹם הִבָּרְאָם׃ ס [3] וַיְחִי
אָדָם שְׁלֹשִׁים וּמְאַת שָׁנָה וַיּוֹלֶד בִּדְמוּתוֹ
כְּצַלְמוֹ וַיִּקְרָא אֶת־שְׁמוֹ שֵׁת׃ [4] וַיִּהְיוּ
יְמֵי־אָדָם אַחֲרֵי הוֹלִידוֹ אֶת־שֵׁת שְׁמֹנֶה

RASHI **3 When Adam had lived 130 years.** Up until this point he had been separated from his wife.

KIMHI "Man" in this generic sense, which of course was applied to both sexes. Naming them in this way distinguished them from all the other creatures. Humans, though their bodies are made of earth—the *adamah* that gives them their name—have a higher soul. One who is drawn after the earthly side of his nature forfeits, as it were, his higher dimension. Just this was true of Cain and his descendants, another reason they are not mentioned here.

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why tell us that Adam "begot a son in his likeness after his image" (v. 3)? That is no great compliment to Seth. Wasn't it true of all the other children as well? ✦ Why did the ancients live so much longer than we do? ✦ Why are we told for each of them (1) the name of his first son, (2) how old he was when that son was born, (3) how long he lived after that son was born, and (4) how long he lived altogether? Can't we add?

IBN EZRA **3 In his likeness after his image.** God gave Adam the power to engender children in his own likeness, making Adam's actions like God's in this respect. **He named him Seth.** There is no mention of Cain or Abel here. Nor does it say how long Cain lived or how old he was when his son Enoch was born. Since the name of Abel was wiped out, Cain's would be too, in the Flood. As for those who insist on asking whom Cain and Seth married—what a stupid question. "Adam . . . begot sons and daughters" (v. 4) and so did all the rest of them.

3 When Adam had lived 130 years. When he was 130 years old. **In his likeness after his image.** See my comment to the similar phrase in 1:26 and also my first comment to 4:26. In our verse, the phrase may also mean "like him physically and mentally." Once Adam repented, his full intelligence was restored. But possibly this did not happen until one-ninth of his life had passed, as if he were still a boy until the age of 130, as the prophet says of messianic times, when "he who dies at a hundred years shall be reckoned a youth" (Isa. 65:20). If so, the children Adam produced before 130 might have had his own reduced intelligence, and only when his intelligence was fully restored could he produce a son at the same level. Our Sages read the phrase to imply that only at 130 did Adam begin to beget offspring "in his likeness after his image"; before then, when he was separated from Eve, he begot spirits and demons.

4 After the birth of Seth, Adam lived 800 years. It would seem that all those who are listed as living for *x* number of years must have been begotten "in his likeness after his image," while the unnamed sons and daughters were not; they acted corruptly and perished in the Flood. It is unclear whether all the children lived these unusually long lives, or whether this applied only to the ones who are named, who did not pursue the bodily appetites that shorten one's life. It may be that the Holy One wished to give them enough leisure to study the various kinds of wisdom and to write them down and teach them to the generations to come. The 70 years that make up most lifetimes ever since the days of Abraham would certainly not be enough to learn wisdom if we did not find the essentials already written down and passed along by tradition from one generation to the next. Again, it may be only the ones that are named here who lived these extraordinarily long lives. Maimonides (see *Guide* 2:47) certainly thought so.

NAHMANIDES **3 He begot a son in his likeness after his image.** Obviously every living thing begotten from another living thing is in its likeness and after its image. This verse is telling us that Adam begot a son "in His likeness after His image," just as Adam himself had originally been. We were not told this about Cain and Abel simply because the text did not wish to discuss them at length. But it does tell us here, because it is Seth on whom the world is based. Or, since Adam was created in a state of complete physical perfection, the verse may be telling us that Seth was in his likeness after his image—his equal in strength and beauty.

4 After the birth of Seth, Adam lived 800 years. Because of the incredible length of their lives, all these paragraphs mention both how long the man lived before begetting and how long he lived afterward; then it adds them to get the total, right up to the generations after the Flood. The reason they lived so long is that Adam was created directly by the Holy One, in a state of complete physical perfection, in looks, strength, and height. Even after being condemned to death, his nature was such that he lived on for a long time. After the Flood, the air was tainted and their lives began to get shorter. For everyone lived this long before the Flood, some of them even longer than Adam. Even Noah's son Shem—who was born before the Flood, of course—lived 600 years; **[M]** the strength he had been born with stood him in good stead, though the foul air harmed him. His descendants, born after the Flood, lived shorter lives. **[N]** The first of them went down to 400 or so, but with Peleg (who lived at the time of the Tower of Babel) the dispersion into various climates cut the life span in half to 200. By the time of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the lifetimes of ordinary people would seem to have been in the range of 70–80 years, as Moses describes them in Ps. 90:10. But "the fear of the LORD prolonged life" (Prov. 10:27) for those in each generation who were righteous. Notice that Pharaoh was amazed to hear that Jacob was 130 years old, though Jacob himself acknowledged that his years "do not come up to the life spans of my fathers" (47:9). I do not agree with Maimonides, who wrote in the *Guide* that only the individuals specifically named had these extraordinarily long lives (whether miraculously or because of their lifestyle and diet), while everyone else had just the normal lifespan. This is empty talk. Why would the men named in this chapter have miracles done for them? They were neither prophets nor were they righteous or good enough to deserve miracles, and certainly not for generation after generation. How could one's lifestyle and diet extend the life span by such incredible multiples? And why would most or all of the others in these generations not have acted in exactly the same way? How could the information about this healthful way of life have not come down to at least one of the future descendants of Noah? They would have all had to know less than their ancestors, generation after generation.

[M] See 11:10–11. **[N]** See 11:12–25.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **3 After his image.** Note the unique "*after* his image" rather than "in his image" (Masorah).

4 After the birth of Seth, Adam lived 800 years. Maimonides' suggestion that these men lived their extraordinarily long lives miraculously has nothing to do with their personal merit. It was to enable the human race both to fill the earth and to develop culture and technology and pass them down. Had they lived lives as short as we do now, death would have overtaken them before they could learn very much. As for the suggestion of some gentile scholars that these are not solar "years," but "cycles" (of the moon), that would mean that Mahalalel and Enoch each had their first child at age five and a half (Abarbanel).

NJPS years and begot sons and daughters. 5All the days that Adam lived came to 930 years; then he died.

6When Seth had lived 105 years, he begot Enosh. 7After the birth of Enosh, Seth lived 807 years and begot sons and daughters. 8All the days of Seth came to 912 years; then he died.

9When Enosh had lived 90 years, he begot Kenan. 10After the birth of Kenan, Enosh lived 815 years and begot sons and daughters. 11All the days of Enosh came to 905 years; then he died.

12When Kenan had lived 70 years, he begot Mahalalel. 13After the birth of Mahalalel, Kenan lived 840 years and begot sons and daughters. 14All the days of Kenan came to 910 years; then he died.

15When Mahalalel had lived 65 years, he begot Jared. 16After the birth of Jared, Mahalalel lived 830 years and begot sons and daughters. 17All the days of Mahalalel came to 895 years; then he died.

18When Jared had lived 162 years, he begot Enoch. 19After the birth of Enoch, Jared lived 800 years and begot sons and daughters. 20All the days of Jared came to 962 years; then he died.

21When Enoch had lived 65 years, he begot Methuselah. 22After the birth of Methuselah, Enoch walked with God 300 years; and he begot sons and daughters. 23All the days of Enoch came to 365 years. 24Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, for God took him.

RASHI **24 Enoch walked with God.** He was righteous, but was the type who

KIMHI **5 All the days that Adam lived came to 930 years.** Since we could have added it up for ourselves, the totals must be given so that scribes would have a way of checking to make sure they did not make an error in the numbers. The two calculations would have to match. The same thing happens with the Israelite census totals. **[R]**

24 Enoch walked with God. For **[R]** See Numbers 2 and 26.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **5 Then he died.** We find this said about all those in this list (but for Enoch, as I shall explain) to indicate that they were all righteous men. Contrast those in the list from Noah to Abraham in Genesis 11. That is also why the total length of their lives—which we could have figured out by addition—is specifically given: to make clear that they all died peacefully, before the Flood (Abarbanel).

מֵאֹ֥ת שָׁנָ֖ה וַיּ֣וֹלֶד בָּנִ֑ים וּבָנֽוֹת׃ 5 וַיִּֽהְיוּ֙
כָּל־יְמֵ֣י אָדָ֔ם אֲשֶׁר־חַ֖י תְּשַׁ֣ע מֵא֑וֹת שָׁנָ֔ה
וּשְׁלֹשִׁ֖ים שָׁנָ֣ה וַיָּמֹ֔ת׃ ס 6 וַיְחִי־שֵׁ֖ת
חָמֵ֣שׁ שָׁנִ֑ים וּמְאַ֥ת שָׁנָ֖ה וַיּ֥וֹלֶד אֶת־אֱנֽוֹשׁ׃
7 וַיְחִי־שֵׁ֗ת אַחֲרֵי֙ הוֹלִיד֣וֹ אֶת־אֱנ֔וֹשׁ שֶׁ֥בַע
שָׁנִ֖ים וּשְׁמֹנֶ֣ה מֵא֑וֹת שָׁנָ֔ה וַיּ֥וֹלֶד בָּנִ֖ים
וּבָנֽוֹת׃ 8 וַיִּֽהְיוּ֙ כָּל־יְמֵי־שֵׁ֔ת שְׁתֵּ֥ים עֶשְׂרֵ֖ה
שָׁנָ֣ה וּתְשַׁ֣ע מֵא֑וֹת שָׁנָ֔ה וַיָּמֹ֖ת׃ ס 9 וַיְחִי
אֱנ֖וֹשׁ תִּשְׁעִ֣ים שָׁנָ֑ה וַיּ֥וֹלֶד אֶת־קֵינָֽן׃
10 וַיְחִי֙ אֱנ֣וֹשׁ אַחֲרֵ֣י הוֹלִיד֔וֹ אֶת־קֵינָ֕ן
חָמֵ֥שׁ עֶשְׂרֵ֖ה שָׁנָ֑ה וּשְׁמֹנֶ֣ה מֵא֔וֹת שָׁנָ֔ה
וַיּ֥וֹלֶד בָּנִ֖ים וּבָנֽוֹת׃ 11 וַיִּֽהְיוּ֙ כָּל־יְמֵ֣י אֱנ֔וֹשׁ
חָמֵ֥שׁ שָׁנִ֖ים וּתְשַׁ֣ע מֵא֑וֹת שָׁנָ֔ה
וַיָּמֹ֖ת׃ ס 12 וַיְחִי֙ קֵינָ֔ן שִׁבְעִ֥ים שָׁנָ֖ה
וַיּ֣וֹלֶד אֶת־מַהֲלַלְאֵ֑ל׃ 13 וַיְחִי֙ קֵינָ֔ן אַחֲרֵי֙
הוֹלִיד֣וֹ אֶת־מַהֲלַלְאֵ֔ל אַרְבָּעִ֣ים שָׁנָ֔ה
וּשְׁמֹנֶ֣ה מֵא֑וֹת שָׁנָ֔ה וַיּ֥וֹלֶד בָּנִ֖ים וּבָנֽוֹת׃
14 וַיִּֽהְיוּ֙ כָּל־יְמֵ֣י קֵינָ֔ן עֶ֥שֶׂר שָׁנִ֖ים וּתְשַׁ֣ע
מֵא֑וֹת שָׁנָ֔ה וַיָּמֹ֖ת׃ ס 15 וַיְחִ֥י מַהֲלַלְאֵ֖ל
חָמֵ֣שׁ שָׁנִ֑ים וְשִׁשִּׁ֥ים שָׁנָ֖ה וַיּ֥וֹלֶד אֶת־יָֽרֶד׃
16 וַיְחִי֙ מַהֲלַלְאֵ֔ל אַחֲרֵי֙ הוֹלִיד֣וֹ אֶת־יֶ֔רֶד
שְׁלֹשִׁ֥ים שָׁנָ֖ה וּשְׁמֹנֶ֣ה מֵא֑וֹת שָׁנָ֔ה וַיּ֥וֹלֶד
בָּנִ֖ים וּבָנֽוֹת׃ 17 וַיִּֽהְיוּ֙ כָּל־יְמֵ֣י מַהֲלַלְאֵ֔ל
חָמֵ֥שׁ וְתִשְׁעִ֖ים שָׁנָ֑ה וּשְׁמֹנֶ֣ה מֵא֔וֹת שָׁנָ֔ה
וַיָּמֹ֖ת׃ ס 18 וַיְחִי־יֶ֔רֶד שְׁתַּ֥יִם וְשִׁשִּׁ֖ים
שָׁנָ֑ה וּמְאַ֥ת שָׁנָ֖ה וַיּ֥וֹלֶד אֶת־חֲנֽוֹךְ׃ 19 וַיְחִי־
יֶ֗רֶד אַחֲרֵי֙ הוֹלִיד֣וֹ אֶת־חֲנ֔וֹךְ שְׁמֹנֶ֥ה מֵא֖וֹת
שָׁנָ֑ה וַיּ֥וֹלֶד בָּנִ֖ים וּבָנֽוֹת׃ 20 וַיִּֽהְיוּ֙ כָּל־יְמֵי־
יֶ֔רֶד שְׁתַּ֥יִם וְשִׁשִּׁ֖ים שָׁנָ֑ה וּתְשַׁ֣ע מֵא֔וֹת
שָׁנָ֖ה וַיָּמֹ֖ת׃ פ 21 וַיְחִ֥י חֲנ֖וֹךְ חָמֵ֣שׁ
וְשִׁשִּׁ֑ים שָׁנָ֔ה וַיּ֥וֹלֶד אֶת־מְתוּשָֽׁלַח׃
22 וַיִּתְהַלֵּ֥ךְ חֲנ֖וֹךְ אֶת־הָאֱלֹהִ֑ים אַחֲרֵי֙
הוֹלִיד֣וֹ אֶת־מְתוּשֶׁ֔לַח שְׁלֹ֥שׁ מֵא֖וֹת שָׁנָ֑ה
וַיּ֥וֹלֶד בָּנִ֖ים וּבָנֽוֹת׃ 23 וַיִּֽהְיוּ֙ כָּל־יְמֵ֣י חֲנ֔וֹךְ
חָמֵ֥שׁ וְשִׁשִּׁ֖ים שָׁנָ֑ה וּשְׁלֹ֥שׁ מֵא֖וֹת שָׁנָֽה׃
24 וַיִּתְהַלֵּ֥ךְ חֲנ֖וֹךְ אֶת־הָאֱלֹהִ֑ים וְאֵינֶ֣נּוּ כִּֽי־

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Once we've been told how long he lived, isn't it redundant to add that "he died"? ✦ What does Enoch's walking with God have to do with "the birth of Methuselah" (v. 22)?

OJPS years; and he begot sons and daughters. 5And all the days that Adam lived were nine hundred and thirty years; and he died.

6And Seth lived a hundred and five years, and begot Enosh. 7And Seth lived after he begot Enosh eight hundred and seven years, and begot sons and daughters. 8And all the days of Seth were nine hundred and twelve years; and he died.

9And Enosh lived ninety years, and begot Kenan. 10And Enosh lived after he begot Kenan eight hundred and fifteen years, and begot sons and daughters. 11And all the days of Enosh were nine hundred and five years; and he died.

12And Kenan lived seventy years, and begot Mahalalel. 13And Kenan lived after he begot Mahalalel eight hundred and forty years, and begot sons and daughters. 14And all the days of Kenan were nine hundred and ten years; and he died.

15And Mahalalel lived sixty and five years, and begot Jared. 16And Mahalalel lived after he begot Jared eight hundred and thirty years, and begot sons and daughters. 17And all the days of Mahalalel were eight hundred ninety and five years; and he died.

18And Jared lived a hundred sixty and two years, and begot Enoch. 19And Jared lived after he begot Enoch eight hundred years, and begot sons and daughters. 20And all the days of Jared were nine hundred sixty and two years; and he died.

21And Enoch lived sixty and five years, and begot Methuselah. 22And Enoch walked with God after he begot Methuselah three hundred years, and begot sons and daughters. 23And all the days of Enoch were three hundred sixty and five years. 24And Enoch walked with God, and he was not; for God took him.

IBN EZRA **24 Enoch walked with God.** As in "*follow* none but the LORD your God" (Deut. 13:5). Noah too "walked with God" (6:9) in this way, though some interpret the Hitpael here to mean that he trained himself to do so. **Then he was no more.** His grave is not known. **For God took him.** That is, he died. Compare "please, LORD, take my life" (Jon. 4:3) and especially "O mortal, I am about to take away the delight of your eyes from you through pestilence" (Ezek. 24:16), where the prophet goes on to say, "In the evening my wife died" (Ezek. 24:18). In Enoch's case, where there is no

18 He begot Enoch. He was dedicated for holiness, being of the seventh generation (Hizkuni).

22 After the birth of Methuselah, Enoch walked with God. But before Methuselah's birth, Enoch was in hot pursuit of sex, which shortens life. Note that all the men in this chapter who had their first child at a younger age than Adam had Seth live shorter lives than he, and vice versa. The fact that the relationships are not mathematically precise is because such general rules also depend on the nature of the individual person (Abarbanel).

23 All the days of Enoch came to 365 years. Note that this is the number of days in a solar year (Abarbanel).

24 Enoch walked with God. He died so young that this was included to emphasize that he was righteous and not evil (Bekhor Shor).

NJPS [25]When Methuselah had lived 187 years, he begot Lamech. [26]After the birth of Lamech, Methuselah lived 782 years and begot sons and daughters. [27]All the days of Methuselah came to 969 years; then he died.

[28]When Lamech had lived 182 years, he begot a son. [29]And he named him Noah, saying, "This one will provide us relief from our work and from the toil of our hands, out of the very soil which the LORD

לֶקַח אֹתוֹ אֱלֹהִים׃ פ [25] וַיְחִי מְתוּשֶׁלַח ✦ בבא
שֶׁבַע וּשְׁמֹנִים שָׁנָה וּמְאַת שָׁנָה וַיּוֹלֶד
אֶת־לֶמֶךְ׃ [26] וַיְחִי מְתוּשֶׁלַח אַחֲרֵי הוֹלִידוֹ
אֶת־לֶמֶךְ שְׁתַּיִם וּשְׁמוֹנִים שָׁנָה וּשְׁבַע
מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה וַיּוֹלֶד בָּנִים וּבָנוֹת׃ [27] וַיִּהְיוּ
כָּל־יְמֵי מְתוּשֶׁלַח תֵּשַׁע וְשִׁשִּׁים שָׁנָה
וּתְשַׁע מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה וַיָּמֹת׃ פ [28] וַיְחִי־
לֶמֶךְ שְׁתַּיִם וּשְׁמֹנִים שָׁנָה וּמְאַת שָׁנָה
וַיּוֹלֶד בֵּן׃ [29] וַיִּקְרָא אֶת־שְׁמוֹ נֹחַ לֵאמֹר
זֶ֣ה* יְנַחֲמֵ֔נוּ מִמַּעֲשֵׂ֖נוּ וּמֵעִצְּבוֹן֙ יָדֵ֔ינוּ מִן־

שני טעמים *v. 29.*

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why are we told that Enoch "was no more, for God took him" (v. 24) and not that "he died," as we are told with the others? ✦ When Lamech named his son Noah, how did he know that "this one will provide us relief from our work and from the toil of our hands" (v. 29)? If he was such a prophet, why didn't he know that the Flood was coming?

OJPS [25]And Methuselah lived a hundred eighty and seven years, and begot Lamech. [26]And Methuselah lived after he begot Lamech seven hundred eighty and two years, and begot sons and daughters. [27]And all the days of Methuselah were nine hundred sixty and nine years; and he died.

[28]And Lamech lived a hundred eighty and two years, and begot a son. [29]And he called his name Noah, saying: "This same shall comfort us in our work and in the toil of our hands, which cometh from the

RASHI could easily have been swayed to do evil. So the Holy One removed him, killing him before his time. **Then he was no more**. He was no more on earth to fill out the number of his days. **For God took him**. Before his time. Compare "O mortal, I am about to *take away* the delight of your eyes from you through pestilence" (Ezek. 24:16).

28 He begot a son. A *ben*, who would "build up" (*banah*) the world once again after the Flood.

29 This one will provide us relief from our work and from the toil of our hands. NJPS translates "relief" correctly. Up to the time of Noah, no one had tools for plowing; he provided them. The earth would bring forth thorns and thistles even when they planted wheat, on account of the curse in 3:18. But Noah "put a stop" to all that (another meaning of the Hebrew verb). There is really no

RASHBAM **5:29 This one will provide us relief.** Rather, it is a prayer: "May this one provide us with relief." He was the first to be born after the death of Adam. "May it be God's will that this one straighten what that one twisted." Lamech

IBN EZRA "pestilence," nor even the words "he died," it is a matter (as in the words of Asaph) of "You guided me by Your counsel and *took* me toward honor" (Ps. 73:24). "God will redeem my life from the clutches of Sheol, for He will *take* me" (Ps. 49:16). One who is enlightened will understand what I mean.

29 This one will provide us relief from our work and from the toil of our hands, out of the very soil. Either Lamech had learned from Adam or Enoch (who were prophets) that the earth would come back to life through the efforts of this newborn, or he figured it out astrologically. (Enoch wrote a number of books that we still have.) Indeed, that is exactly what happened. The world continued to exist only on Noah's account. And of course he was someone who worked the land, a "tiller of the soil" (9:20). It is also possible that he acquired this meaningful name only later, when he succeeded in working the land, as Gideon acquired the name Jerubbaal. **[W]** Both Noah's name (based on the letters נח, meaning "rest") and this word "relief" (based on נחם, meaning "comfort") are essentially the opposite of the "toil" mentioned in the verse. Rest is a relief to the toil of the body as comfort is a relief to the toil of the heart. You must always remember that the Hebrew of the Bible focuses on meanings and is not concerned

[W] See Judges 6.

KIMHI "walk" in this particular conjugation, compare "the God in whose ways my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked" (48:15). It means that he placed all his desire in the love of God and in occupying himself with wisdom. Once he reached the age of 65 (v. 21), he recognized his Creator. Nonetheless he continued to beget children for another 300 years, until he had so successfully sought the love of God that he despised his physical body. Then, at the midpoint of his life, God removed him. **Then he was no more**. He had no illness or injury. No one imagined that he was about to die; they assumed he would live as long as the others of his ilk. Suddenly, he died and "was no more." **For God took him**. That is, took his soul and brought it on high: "God will redeem my life from the clutches of Sheol, for He will *take* me" (Ps. 49:16). God does not "take" the soul of the wicked—it does go down to Sheol. (Since Ezek. 24:16 mentions "pestilence," God's "taking" the prophet's wife is not the same phenomenon under discussion here.) The Jewish masses, **[S]** and a few of our Sages as well, believe that both Enoch and Elijah were taken body and soul into the garden of Eden, where they still live, and will live until the days of the Messiah, eating fruit from the trees and serving God as Adam originally did before he sinned. But notice that the comparable list in Genesis 11 does not say "he died" about anyone. The truth is simply that the ones in our list lived so extraordinarily long that the text had to tell us "he died." This was not true of those in the Genesis 11 list, or of Enoch here.

29 This one will provide us relief from our work. As the Sages point out, the name Noah and the explanation "comfort us" (as OJPS more precisely translates *yenaḥamenu*) do not match. It should have said "he will give us rest" (*yaniḥenu*), or else he should have been named Nahman. This is all true, but relief from distress is indeed comforting, which is why the two words resemble each other. The holy tongue does not make precise distinctions in the case of names; see 1 Sam. 1:20, where Hannah named her son Samuel but explained that "I asked [*she'iltiv*] the LORD for him," an explanation that matches not "Samuel" but "Saul." Again, both names are close, since "Samuel" hints at "asked *from God*" (*sha'ul me-el*). There are other similar cases. The Sages ask further: How could Lamech know that Noah would provide relief? He must have been a great prophet! **And from the toil of our hands**. What relief did Noah provide? He invented the plow, to be drawn by oxen. Up until then, they had done all their agricultural work with hoes and mattocks. **Which the LORD placed under a curse**. See 3:17. Even after Noah, one still had to toil to eat. But he, by his ingenuity, made things a little easier. The

[S] Some texts say "the Targum" (i.e., Onkelos). But our texts of Onkelos say that God "put Enoch to death"—though some manuscripts say "did *not* put Enoch to death."

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **God took him**. From among those wicked people (Bekhor Shor). But it does not say that "he died," as it does with the others; this was to emphasize that, despite his bad start, before his death he in fact achieved wholeness and earned a place in the World to Come (Abarbanel).

29 This one will provide us relief from our work and from the toil of our hands. Once Cain and all his descendants have died in the Flood, the curse will be removed and the ground will return to its original fertility (Bekhor Shor).

NJPS placed under a curse." 30After the birth of Noah, Lamech lived 595 years and begot sons and daughters. 31All the days of Lamech came to 777 years; then he died.

32When Noah had lived 500 years, Noah begot Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

OJPS ground which the LORD hath cursed." 30And Lamech lived after he begot Noah five hundred ninety and five years, and begot sons and daughters. 31And all the days of Lamech were seven hundred seventy and seven years; and he died.

32And Noah was five hundred years old; and Noah begot Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

הָאֲדָמָ֔ה אֲשֶׁ֥ר אֵֽרְרָ֖ה יְהוָֽה׃ 30 וַיְחִי־לֶ֖מֶךְ
אַחֲרֵ֣י הוֹלִיד֑וֹ אֶת־נֹ֕חַ חָמֵ֥שׁ וְתִשְׁעִ֖ים
שָׁנָ֣ה וַחֲמֵ֣שׁ מֵא֔וֹת שָׁנָ֖ה וַיּ֥וֹלֶד בָּנִ֖ים וּבָנֽוֹת׃
31 וַיְהִ֣י כָל־יְמֵי־לֶ֔מֶךְ שֶׁ֥בַע וְשִׁבְעִ֖ים שָׁנָ֑ה
וּשְׁבַ֥ע מֵא֖וֹת שָׁנָ֣ה וַיָּמֹֽת׃ ס 32 וַיְהִי־נֹ֖חַ
בֶּן־חֲמֵ֣שׁ מֵא֔וֹת שָׁנָ֑ה וַיּ֣וֹלֶד נֹ֔חַ אֶת־שֵׁ֖ם
אֶת־חָ֥ם וְאֶת־יָֽפֶת׃

6 When men began to increase on earth and daughters were born to them, 2the divine beings saw how beautiful the

6 And it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born unto them, 2that the sons of God saw the daughters of men that

ו וַיְהִ֣י כִֽי־הֵחֵ֗ל הָאָדָם֙ לָרֹ֔ב עַל־פְּנֵ֖י
הָאֲדָמָ֑ה וּבָנ֥וֹת יֻלְּד֖וּ לָהֶֽם׃ 2 וַיִּרְא֣וּ בְנֵי־
הָאֱלֹהִ֗ים אֶת־בְּנ֤וֹת הָאָדָם֙ כִּ֣י טֹבֹ֔ת הֵ֖נָּה

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Who are the "divine beings" and "the daughters of men" (v. 1)?

RASHI other way than this—*yanaḥ* [*mim*]*menu*—to interpret the verb *yenaḥamenu* as related to the name Noah. If it were *yenaḥem* ("comfort"), you would have to name him Menahem.

32 When Noah had lived 500 years. Said R. Yudan: Why is it that all the others begot children after a century or two, but this one only after five centuries? The Holy One thought: If his sons are wicked, they will perish in the floodwaters, which would be an evil thing to do to this righteous man. But if they are righteous, I will have to trouble him to make a lot of arks. So He suppressed Noah's seed, and he did not beget children until he was 500 years old. This way, Japheth, his oldest son, would not yet be subject to punishment when the Flood came. For in the future "he who dies at a hundred years shall be reckoned a youth" (Isa. 65:20), and it was this way before the giving of the Torah as well. **Shem, Ham, and Japheth.** Wasn't Japheth the oldest? But you would naturally ask first about Shem, who was righteous, was born circumcised, and from whom Abraham was descended; see Genesis Rabbah.

RASHBAM understood the curse that Adam must eat by toil "all the days of your life" (3:17), literally: "all the days of *your* life."

31 Lamech lived 595 years. Why does the Torah bother to tell us how long wicked people like this lived? It is part of the chronological framework of the Bible, tracking history from the creation forward. The Torah enumerates the life spans of all the generations up to Noah; then from Noah to Abraham; then those of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Levi, Kohath, Amram, and Moses. The rest of the Bible continues by enumerating the life spans of Joshua, the judges, and the kings; the 70 years of exile in Babylon; and, in Daniel, the years of the Second Temple. **[L]**

[L] See Rashbam's comment to Exod. 6:16.

6:2 The divine beings. Rather, "the sons of *elohim*," that is, of the princes and

KIMHI straightforward sense of the verse, though, is not that Lamech was a prophet, but that the name was an expression of hope, as when Rachel named Joseph (see 30:24).

31 All the days of Lamech came to 777 years; then he died. Moses wrote all these details about the names and ages of the generations from Adam to Noah at God's dictation. The purpose was so that we, the inheritors of his Torah in future generations, would know about the creation of the world and be able to figure out when it took place.

32 When Noah had lived 500 years. We do not know why he waited so long to have children. Those who came before him had their first children at the age of 100 or so. Apparently in those days they did not feel the need to find a wife until that age; even then, they did not pursue the desires of the flesh, but they did want to have offspring. They knew that they would live quite a long time, so around the age of 100 they would seek a wife and reproduce. Their first son would take after their own good ways, which is why they are named and their ages given. But Noah, seeing that his generation was evil, was afraid his offspring would be too. So he waited until the age of 500 to get involved with a woman and have children. Perhaps he was told by a prophecy to do so at that time. Then he had three good sons—though Ham was not quite up to the level of the other two—but no daughters. **Noah begot Shem, Ham, and Japheth.** The Sages reckon as follows: Japheth must have been the eldest. The Flood occurred when Noah was 600. Since he begot his eldest at 500, that son must have been 99 when the Flood came and 100 after it. But "Shem was 100 years old when he begot Arpachshad, two years *after* the Flood" (11:10). So (they conclude) Japheth must have been the eldest. But if that is so, why would the text here and everywhere else list them as "Shem, Ham, and Japheth"? In fact, Shem begot Arpachshad two years after the *beginning* of the Flood. When the Flood began, he was 99. When it was over, he was 100, and he was still 100 early in the *second* year after the beginning of the Flood, when he begot Arpachshad.

IBN EZRA to use precisely the same words every time. Remember that Jerubbaal himself is called Jerubbesheth in 2 Sam. 11:21.

6:2 The divine beings saw how beautiful the daughters of men were and took wives. Not "divine beings" but "the

6:1 When men began to increase on earth. More precisely, "Man," the species. **And daughters were born to them.** There could be no need to mention this, since the world could not exist without both males and females. But the story that follows is about the females, after whom the men went astray.

2 The divine beings. Rather, "the sons of *elohim*" (OJPS), meaning here not "God" but "the judges," that is, the magistrates, the

NAHMANIDES **6:1 When men began to increase on earth.** Having reached the generation of Noah and his sons and wanting to begin the story of the Flood, the text says that as soon as the population began to grow they began to sin. They continued to sin for a long time, until Noah was 480 years old. That was when the Holy One announced that He would not abide them forever (see v. 3). **[O]** But He would give them another few years before their full measure of sin was complete. That is how divine justice works.

2 The divine beings. Rashi's comment is found in Genesis Rabbah as well. But if it were so, let the text tell us that their judges were

[O] See Rashi's comment there.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **31 Lamech lived 595 years.** The precise details given in this chapter are to lend it verisimilitude. But no one could have attained these extraordinary ages without miraculous intervention on the part of the Holy One (Gersonides).

6:2 The divine beings. This phrase also occurs only in 6:4 and Job 1:6 and 2:1 (Masorah). The giants; "God" is used in this phrase

NJPS daughters of men were and took wives from among those that pleased them.—[3]The LORD said, "My breath shall not abide in man forever, since he too is flesh; let the days allowed him be one hundred

וַיִּקְחוּ לָהֶם֙ נָשִׁ֔ים מִכֹּ֖ל אֲשֶׁ֥ר בָּחָֽרוּ׃
3 וַיֹּ֣אמֶר יְהוָ֔ה לֹא־יָד֥וֹן רוּחִ֖י בָּאָדָ֣ם לְעֹלָ֑ם
בְּשַׁגַּ֣ם הוּא֮ בָּשָׂר֒ וְהָי֣וּ יָמָ֔יו מֵאָ֥ה וְעֶשְׂרִ֖ים

OJPS they were fair; and they took them wives, whomsoever they chose. [3]And the LORD said: "My spirit shall not abide in man for ever, for that he also is flesh; therefore shall his days be a hundred and

RASHI judges. The word *elohim* always refers to lordship, but it can be used of human beings as well as God: "Thus he shall serve as your spokesman, with you playing the role of *elohim* to him" (Exod. 4:16); "The LORD replied to Moses, 'See, I place you in the role of *elohim* to Pharaoh, with your brother Aaron as your prophet'" (Exod. 7:1). **How beautiful the daughters of men were.** Said R. Yudan: "Beautiful" is spelled as if it could be in the singular or even a verb. It points to a woman who was beautified and ornamented for her wedding night. The great ruler would go in and have sex with her first. **Those that pleased them.** Any who pleased them, including women who were already married, and even men and beasts.

3 My breath shall not abide in man forever. Rather, "My spirit shall not trouble Me about man forever." Right now My spirit is debating within Me whether to destroy them or be merciful to them. But this debate within Me will not go on "forever"—that is, not for long. **Since he too is flesh.** The difficult Hebrew word *b'shagam* should be interpreted as if it were *bishvil she-gam*, "because also of this [fact about him]." He is flesh, yet he refuses to submit to Me. Just imagine if he were made of fire, or of some hard substance! — For other cases of *sha-* instead of the standard *she-*, see Judg. 5:7 and 6:17. **Let the days allowed him be one hundred and twenty years.** I will keep My temper for 120 years. If they have not repented by then, I will bring a Flood upon them. — If you object that from the birth of Japheth to the Flood was only 100 years, remember that the Torah is not written in chronological order. This decree was issued 20 years before Noah begot children. (See Seder Olam for confirmation of this chronology.) There are many midrashim

KIMHI great leaders. As R. Simeon b. Yohai explains in Genesis Rabbah, when the leaders themselves destabilize society, you are in real trouble. **The daughters of men.** The daughters of the masses, the weaker men, who could not defend them from the sons of the great. See Ps. 49:3, where *b'nei adam* (the term used here) refers to the poor and *ish* to the rich.

3 The LORD said. He "said" this to Himself, or to Noah. **My breath shall not abide in man forever.** My father of blessed memory understood *yadon* ("abide") to be related to the noun *madon* ("quarrel"). "The higher spirit that I breathed into man cannot struggle forever with the body and its animal appetites." The link with "sheath" of 1 Chron. 21:27 **[T]** is quite plausible; for a similar pair of words, see 25:29. **Since he too is flesh.** Rather,

[T] See Ibn Ezra's comment.

NAHMANIDES openly performing violent acts and no one stopped them from doing so. See instead my comments to v. 4. **Saw how beautiful the daughters of men were.** Rather, "they saw the daughters of men, and *when* they were beautiful . . ." For *ki* meaning "when," see (e.g.) "*When* you see the ass of your enemy lying under its burden" (Exod. 23:5); "*If*, along the road, you chance upon a bird's nest" (Deut. 22:6). **And took wives.** They took them by force. **From among those that pleased them.** Even if they were married to other men. The text describes the violence of their actions, but it does not explicitly mention the prohibitions of various kinds of sexual relations; the punishment was decreed against them for the violence only. That is something any sensible person could figure out. No Torah was needed.

3 My breath shall not abide in man forever, since he too is flesh. Rashi's comment about "since he too is flesh" is unsatisfying. As for Ibn Ezra's explanation, what would be the point of it? *Obviously* they are flesh—but their death has already been decreed: "For dust you are, and to dust you shall return" (3:19). In my view, the phrase is saying, "My *spirit* shall not abide in man for ever [OJPS]—for he too is flesh, just like all flesh that creeps over the earth, the birds and the beasts. He does not deserve to have a divine spirit in him." God made man fit to be like one of the ministering angels with the soul that was in him, but he is drawn after the flesh and its physical appetites, "like the

RASHBAM **6:3 My breath shall not abide in man forever.** Rather, "My spirit shall not judge man forever," deliberating whether or not to wipe out humankind.

IBN EZRA sons of the rulers" who enforce divine justice on earth. Others think it really does mean "sons of God" (OJPS), in the sense of "holy people," as the expression is used in "you are children of the LORD your God" (Deut. 14:1). Still others think the "sons of God" are the sons of Seth (Judah Halevi is of this opinion) and the "daughters of men" (literally, "of Adam") are the female descendants of Cain. What I think it means is that those who had access to divine knowledge were able to choose the women who were matched with them astrologically and physiologically. That is how they were able to produce "heroes" (v. 4). But it could simply mean that they "took" their wives by force.

3 My breath shall not abide in man forever. Some think this means God is saying He will remove it, as when He "ordered the angel to return his sword to its sheath" (1 Chron. 21:27). In this view, the noun *nadan* ("sheath") is related to the verb *yadon* ("abide") in our verse. The body is a kind of "sheath" in which God's "spirit" (OJPS) temporarily abides. In the Aramaic of Dan. 7:15, "My spirit was disturbed within me," the spirit is literally inside a *nadan*. But these are separate roots. (There are many cases where the same two letters may be preceded by י or נ in one root and have a י or ו between them in a second root.) Others point out that the form of *yadon* resembles *yashov* of Eccles. 12:7. It would therefore mean that "My" spirit ("Mine" in the sense that the spirit comes from God) "will not judge" man forever. For the spirit is the body's judge. The point is that the spirit cannot stay forever in the body: "The dust returns to the ground as it was, and the *lifebreath* returns to God who bestowed it" (Eccles. 12:7). Only man has this kind of spirit. Yet it will not remain in him due to the "lawlessness" coming up in v. 11. Moreover, man is made of flesh, which reaches its limit and begins to decline, until the made outpaces the maker. **[X] Since.** The *sha-* syllable of this

[X] The strength of the growing child moves past that of the declining parent.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS to indicate the superlative, as in "the *high* mountains" of Ps. 36:7, which are literally "the mountains of God" (Gersonides). **And took wives from among those that pleased them.** Without checking into their fathers and brothers, as our Sages suggest one should do (Abarbanel).

3 My breath shall not abide in man forever. I did not punish Adam or Cain immediately when they sinned, for "they were but flesh, a passing breath that does not return" (Ps. 78:39); the same is true for these people (Bekhor Shor). "The intelligence I created in the human race will not be able to make them act properly unless I come up with some sort of plan." This was undoubtedly spoken to a prophet: Noah (Gersonides).

NJPS and twenty years."—[4]It was then, and later too, that the Nephilim appeared on earth—when the divine beings cohabited with the daughters of men, who bore them offspring. They were the heroes of old, the men of renown.

OJPS twenty years." [4]The Nephilim were in the earth in those days, and also after that, when the sons of God came in unto the daughters of men, and they bore children to them; the same were the mighty men that were of old, the men of renown.

שָׁנָה׃ 4 הַנְּפִלִים הָיוּ בָאָרֶץ בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם וְגַם אַחֲרֵי־כֵן אֲשֶׁר יָבֹאוּ בְּנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים אֶל־בְּנוֹת הָאָדָם וְיָלְדוּ לָהֶם הַמָּה הַגִּבֹּרִים אֲשֶׁר מֵעוֹלָם אַנְשֵׁי הַשֵּׁם׃ פ

RASHI about the phrase "My breath shall not abide," but this is clearly the straightforward sense of it.

4 It was then. Literally, "in those days" (OJPS)—in the days of the generation of Enosh and the sons of Cain. **[S] And later too.** Even after seeing how the generation of Enosh perished—for the Ocean arose and washed away one-third of the world—the generation of the Flood did not learn from their example and submit. **The Nephilim.** Because they fell (*naphlu*) and caused the world itself to fall (*hippilu*). But in Hebrew the word is simply used to mean "titans." **The divine beings cohabited with the daughters of men.** Who would give birth to giants just like them. **They were the heroes of old.** More literally, "the mighty men," mighty enough to rebel against the Holy One. **The men of renown.** Rather, "the men of name," the descendants of Cain who are named in 4:18, Irad, Mehujael, and Methusael, whose names indicate how

[S] Another version of Rashi's comment suggests that he wrote "the generation of Enosh and his son Kenan"; but see his comment to "the men of renown."

KIMHI "he is flesh, too," not just spirit, and the flesh pulls the spirit in the animal direction. **Let the days allowed him be one hundred and twenty years.** I will give them another 120 years. If they repent, fine. If not, I will wipe them off the earth. Why precisely 120 years we do not know, other than that this was the will of the Creator.

4 It was then, and later too, that the Nephilim appeared on earth. As the NJPS punctuation demonstrates, this verse is the continuation of v. 2; v. 3 is parenthetical. "Later" the corrupt behavior of v. 2 happened even more frequently, since the Nephilim bred daughters who were themselves titans. **They were the heroes of old.** The heroes whose memory persisted into later generations. **The men of renown.** They were renowned

NAHMANIDES beasts that perish" (Ps. 49:13 and 21). So the spirit of God would no longer abide in him. He is physical, not divine. But the Holy One would wait a while and give them the chance to repent: "He remembered that they were but flesh, a passing breath that does not return" (Ps. 78:39).

4 It was then, and later too. Rashi has his own explanation for this. But if Ibn Ezra is right, then the wives of Noah's sons would have to be related to them and resemble them. Or perhaps he accepts the midrash that claims Og escaped the Flood. I suppose he even thinks some others escaped along with him, since there were Nephilim (in the plural) "later" too. But see my comment to "the divine beings." **The Nephilim.** Rashi's comment comes from Genesis Rabbah. The linguists say the mere sight of them would make anyone who saw them fall (*naphal*) to the ground in shock. (The Emim of 14:5—the "Dreads"—got their name in a similar way.) **The divine beings.** Rather, "the children of God" (compare OJPS). In my view, this refers to Adam and his wife, called this because they were the work of His hands and He was their father. They had no other father. Adam, of course, "begot sons and daughters" (5:4), and these were the first people born to a father and a mother, great both in size and in strength. For they, like Seth, were begotten "in his likeness after his image" (5:3). It could be that all the children of the first generations, those of "Adam, Seth, Enosh" (1 Chron. 1:1), were called "the children of God," for those three were in God's image. (That is certainly the opinion of Genesis Rabbah.) But then idolatry started, and weakness and frailty began to spread. **Cohabited with the daughters of men.** When the population began to increase and had daughters, these first men were still in their full strength. Due to their great appetites, they chose for themselves the most beautiful of the women, the tallest and healthiest ones. V. 2 describes them taking the women by violence; here we learn that they were simply fornicating with the daughters of the lesser men. No one knew about it until these women began to bear children, and everyone recognized that the children were not those of the ordinary men but of the "children of God." For they were still bigger than everyone else, though smaller than their fathers. That is, they were called Nephilim because they had "fallen" in stature from their fathers; the root is used this way in "I . . . am not *less* than you" (Job 12:3). **They were the heroes.** Compared to the others. They were the Nephilim, and "later too" they themselves begot children who were also Nephilim. **Of old.** As people called them after the Flood, by comparison with the heroes of their own day: "There were heroes greater than these 'long since, in ages that went by before us' [Eccles. 1:10]." **The men of renown.** As they

IBN EZRA word is the equivalent of the more common *she-*, an alternative form of the relative pronoun *asher*. **Let the days allowed him be one hundred and twenty years.** Some say this expression is describing the limit of (most) human life. We do find some in the Bible who live longer than this, but very few. This view, however, is quite wrong. Shem (11:10–11) lived 600 years, and all the ensuing generations lived similarly long lives. Only with Peleg (11:18–19) did lives begin to grow shorter. From David's time to our own, "the span of our life is [just] seventy years, or, given the strength, eighty years" (Ps. 90:10). The truth is what Onkelos said: God was giving mankind a deadline. Just as when Jonah announced, "Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" (Jon. 3:4), here too if they repented they would escape and if not they would die. Pay no attention to the fact that this warning follows the notice that "Noah had lived 500 years" (5:32) and that "Noah was six hundred years old when the Flood came" (7:6). You must not expect everything in the Torah to be written chronological order. After all, 11:32 tells us that "Terah died in Haran," after which we find that "the LORD said to Abram, 'Go forth from your native land'" (12:1)—yet we can easily figure out that Terah must have lived until Abraham's yet-unborn son Isaac was 35 years old. This is just one example out of many I could have chosen.

4 And later too. After the Flood. Remember that "the Anakites are part of the Nephilim" (Num. 13:33). **The Nephilim.** "The fallen"—a prayer for their destruction,

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **4 It was then.** When the Holy One gave them time to repent (Sforno). **And later too.** After the Lord got angry at them; as the rest of the verse shows, they did not submit but continued their violent behavior (Hizkuni). When they had completely failed to repent (Sforno). **Nephilim.** The word also occurs only in Num. 13:33, but twice there (Masorah). People so amazingly tall that anyone standing next to them would be afraid they would fall (*nophel*) on him (Bekhor Shor). The word is related to *niphla* ("amazing"); for another example of this word with א missing, see Exod. 33:16 (Hizkuni). The word means "miscarriages." These giants stupidly slept with women of normal size, who were tiny and delicate in comparison to them. The women could not carry such giant babies to term, so many babies of the kind appeared on earth both "then, and later too." Whenever there was such a mismatch, the babies were born prematurely (Abarbanel). **They were the heroes of old, the men of renown.** The text is clarifying that they were not

NJPS 5The LORD saw how great was man's wickedness on earth, and how every plan devised by his mind was nothing but evil all the time. 6And the LORD regretted that He had made man on earth, and His

OJPS 5And the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. 6And it repented the LORD that He had made man on the earth, and it grieved Him at His

מפטיר

5 וַיַּרְא יְהוָה כִּי רַבָּה רָעַת הָאָדָם בָּאָרֶץ
וְכָל־יֵצֶר מַחְשְׁבֹת לִבּוֹ רַק רַע כָּל־הַיּוֹם׃
6 וַיִּנָּחֶם יְהוָה כִּי־עָשָׂה אֶת־הָאָדָם בָּאָרֶץ

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why did the Lord regret "that He had made man on earth" (v. 6)?

RASHI they perished: They were "uprooted" (Methusael), "driven off" (Irad), and "wiped out" (Mehujael). **[T]** Another reading: not just men of *shem* ("name") but of *shemamon*, "destruction," for they destroyed the world.

6 The LORD regretted that He had made man on earth. Rather, He was "comforted" that He had made man on earth and not in the upper worlds, where man would have caused *them* to rebel. **His heart was saddened.** The Hebrew more literally says, "He grieved himself at His heart" (compare OJPS). The sense is that it arose in the "heart" (that is, the mind) of the Holy One to cause grief to mankind. That is how Onkelos translates it. Another reading of the verse: The Lord "changed" from His aspect of mercy to His aspect of judgment. There arose before Him in thought the question of what to do about the man He had created on earth. The essential meaning of the Biblical Hebrew verb translated here as "repent" or "regret" is "to consider what to do." See Exod. 32:14, Num. 23:19, Deut. 32:36, and 1 Sam. 15:11 for examples.

His heart was saddened. At the coming destruction of what He Himself had

[T] Rashi's text as we have it says merely "they were wiped out and uprooted."

IBN EZRA as in "Fair Babylon, you destroyed one" (Ps. 137:8). They are called this because the heart of anyone who sees them would fall (*naphal*), being stunned by their incredible height.

6 The LORD regretted that He had made man. Obviously "He is not human that He should change His mind" (1 Sam. 15:29); the text is speaking in human terms here. A human being who destroys what he has made appears to have changed his mind. **His heart was saddened.** The opposite of "may the LORD rejoice in His works" (Ps. 104:31), which really means that He finds it good when His creations can receive His kindness. Others relate "regret" in our verse to the related form of this verb used in "Your brother Esau is *consoling himself by planning* to kill you" (27:42), where it has the same meaning as the root יעד ("to set a time"); compare Arabic *wa'ada*. They claim that the "heart" here is the heart of some prophet: "The Lord set a time limit on the man He had made, and the prophet's heart was grieved." But "at" of "it grieved Him *at* His heart" (see the more literal OJPS) makes

KIMHI in later generations. But after the Flood, those who remained saw that the pursuit of one's physical appetites was evil in God's eyes, and they so diminished that pursuit that their lifespans shortened greatly and they grew smaller in size as well. By the time the Israelites entered Canaan only four were left: "Ahiman, Sheshai, and Talmai" (Num. 13:22) and their titan father in Hebron. There were a few others, the "Rephaim," e.g., Og (see Josh. 13:12) and Ishbi-benob (see 2 Sam. 21:16). It may be that these reverted to the antediluvian lifestyle, reverting not only to giant size but also to extended lifespans.

5 The LORD saw how great was man's wickedness on earth, and how every plan devised by his mind was nothing but evil all the time. When the period of 120 years drew to a close, He saw that they had gotten not better but worse "all the time"—literally, "every day" was worse than the previous one. And "every plan" is more correctly "each impulse," of the two impulses, one good and one evil, in the human heart. Now everything was on the evil side and nothing on the good. The Hebrew word for "impulse" is *yetzer* ("formation"), because these impulses are formed in the mind (or, as OJPS more literally translates, the heart), which works to carry them out. The Lord, of course, knew that even after 120 years they would not repent. But He wanted human beings to learn from His ways and be patient with those who do them wrong. They should not take revenge immediately even when it is in their power, for the wrongdoer might repent. God created His world to be a good one—at least largely, if not entirely—so if it were to be "nothing but evil" He would not want it. But the generation of the Flood was committing such crimes of sex and violence that they were destroying the world order. Their deeds were opposed to His. He therefore decided to destroy the lower world, leaving only whatever good might be found in it, even if that was just a fraction of it, in order to keep it going into the future. He did leave Noah, finding him good, along with his sons and their wives, so that it would be possible for them to have offspring. Lamech, Noah's father, had already died five years before the Flood, and the life of Methuselah, who lived five years longer than his son Lamech, came to an end just as the Flood began. So there was no one left on earth who was righteous other than Noah and his sons.

6 The LORD regretted. There is never any change whatsoever in God the exalted. **That He had made man on earth.** And *with* earth, pulling him toward the physical side of his nature, rather than the part that was in the image of God. But He had no such "regrets" about Noah or anyone else like him. **His heart was saddened.** This too is metaphoric. In strict truth, there is in Him no change whatsoever, no joy and no sadness. But human beings are glad when things go right and sad when they go wrong, and the narrative gives the Lord the appropriate feeling here—in His "heart" because that is where human emotions are felt. As R. Joshua b. Levi said: The Holy One "grieved" (OJPS) like a mourner, for seven days: "And on the seventh day the waters of the Flood came upon the earth" (7:10).

NAHMANIDES were called in all succeeding generations. This is the logical, straightforward explanation of this whole passage. But Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer, which relates it to the angels who fell from heaven, fits the language of the text more suitably than any other interpretation, though this divine mystery would demand a lengthy explanation.

6 And the LORD regretted that He had made man on earth, and His heart was saddened. The text is speaking in human terms here. "They rebelled, and grieved His holy spirit" (Isa. 63:10) by their crimes. But the latter phrase of our verse more literally says that "it grieved Him *in His heart*" (compare OJPS). He did not tell this to any prophet. The idiom "in one's heart" is the Biblical Hebrew way of referring to thought, as in "I had scarcely finished praying in my heart" (24:45) and the like. The midrash in Genesis Rabbah about the

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS literally "sons of God," as v. 2 (see OJPS) calls them, and also that, despite not being carried to term, these babies were so large and strong that they could survive (Abarbanel).

5 The LORD saw how great was man's wickedness on earth, and how every plan devised by his mind was nothing but evil all the time. Rather, how great man's wickedness *had* been, and how every plan he devised *would* be nothing but evil (Sforno).

6 The LORD regretted that He had made man on earth. Rather, that He had made man *of* earth. They were "nothing but evil all the time" because of their earthly nature. It does not say that He regretting having created man, only that He regretted having *made*

NJPS heart was saddened. 7The LORD said, "I will blot out from the earth the men whom I created—men together with beasts, creeping things, and birds of the sky; for I regret that I made them." 8But Noah found favor with the LORD.

OJPS heart. 7And the LORD said: "I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and creeping thing, and fowl of the air; for it repenteth Me that I have made them." 8But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD.

וַיִּתְעַצֵּב אֶל־לִבּוֹ׃ 7 וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶמְחֶה
אֶת־הָאָדָם אֲשֶׁר־בָּרָאתִי מֵעַל פְּנֵי
הָאֲדָמָה מֵאָדָם עַד־בְּהֵמָה עַד־רֶמֶשׂ וְעַד־
עוֹף הַשָּׁמָיִם כִּי נִחַמְתִּי כִּי עֲשִׂיתִם׃ 8 וְנֹחַ
מָצָא חֵן בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה׃ פ

RASHI created: "the king *was grieving* over his son" (2 Sam. 19:3). This I wrote as a response to the Christians:

A gentile asked R. Joshua b. Korha, "Don't you admit that the Holy One sees in advance what will happen in the future?"

"Of course," he replied.

"But it is written, 'His heart was saddened.' Didn't He already know what would happen?"

"Tell me," said R. Joshua. "Have you ever had a son?"

"Yes, I have."

"And what did you do when he was born?"

"I celebrated, and got everyone to celebrate with me."

"Didn't you know that he will one day die?"

"There is a time for rejoicing and a time for mourning."

R. Joshua said, "That is how the Holy One acted. Even though He knew perfectly well that they would end up sinning and perishing, He did not refrain from creating them—for the sake of the righteous who would arise from among them."

7 The LORD said, "I will blot out from the earth the men whom I created." Man is made of dust; I will bring water upon him and blot him out. (That is why this specific verb is used.) **Men together with beasts.** The animals too had corrupted their ways. Another reading: Everything was created for the sake of man. Once he was done for, what need was there of the rest? **For I regret that I made them.** Rather, "I have considered what to do about the fact that I made them."

IBN EZRA this understanding impossible. Besides which, where do we find a prophet referred to as "heart"?

7 The LORD said. To Himself, or to the angels. Not, as some think, to Noah—to "say to one's heart" (that is how this connects with v. 6) is an idiom for speaking to oneself.

8 Noah found favor with the LORD. He alone. His sons, and the wives, escaped on his account (contrast Ezek. 14:13–20). "Finding favor" here simply means that God had compassion for him. See the related noun in "there has been a *reprieve* from the LORD our God" (Ezra 9:8). Like "end" (v. 13), "favor" here is a geminate noun. Again, "finding favor" in our verse is the opposite of "No one pitied you enough to do any one of these things for you out of compassion for you" (Ezek. 16:5) Literally, "no *eye*" pitied you, just as our verse literally says that Noah found favor "*in the eyes* of the LORD" (OJPS).

KIMHI **7 The LORD said.** To Himself, or to Noah. **I will blot out from the earth the men whom I created.** The *adam*—and how better to remove *adamah*, "earth," than with water? **Men together with beasts, creeping things, and birds of the sky.** Including in "beasts" larger animals of all kinds, and in "creeping things" the smaller ones. And with the entire surface of the earth covered by water, they could in any case not survive except by miraculous means. God's providence does not extend to individual animals, only to their species, which would not perish, since He commanded Noah to preserve them. You might also ask why the waters would have to cover the entire earth rather than just the places inhabited by humans. But of course the people would flee to those places. That is why the water had to cover even the tops of the highest mountains. (Our Sages say that the animals too were interbreeding between species.)

8 But Noah found favor with the LORD. In Genesis Rabbah, R. Abba b. Kahana says: Even Noah did not deserve to survive. But he "found favor with the Lord."

NAHMANIDES king who hired an architect to build him a palace is extremely worthwhile in this context. **[P]** But it is a great secret, which cannot be written down. One who understands it should examine our text carefully to determine why it uses the name "LORD" when the rest of this passage and the story of the Flood uses "God." **[Q]**

8 But Noah found favor with the LORD. As when the Lord said to Moses, "You have truly gained My favor" (Exod. 33:17), all of Noah's actions were pleasant to Him. See similarly "the LORD was with Joseph: He extended kindness to him and disposed the chief jailer *favorably* toward him" (39:21) and "Esther won the *admiration* of all who saw her" (Esther 2:15). Contrast this with what the text tells us about the rest of his generation, whose actions gave the Holy One nothing but grief. In what follows, we will be told *why* Noah found favor with the Lord—because he was "a righteous man, blameless in his age" (v. 9).

[P] "The king was unhappy with the palace. With whom should he be upset if not the architect?" The architect of the midrash corresponds with God's heart in our text. **[Q]** See Special Topics, "Nahmanides' Mysticism."

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS him (Abarbanel). **His heart was saddened.** Rather, "it grieved Him about his [man's] heart" (Bekhor Shor). Rather, He was "angry" at man's evil heart (Abarbanel). For it is not His desire that anyone should die (Sforno).

7 The LORD said, "I will blot out from the earth the men whom I created." Not "*we* will blot out," but "*I* will blot out." Since the angels had not been willing to have man created in the first place, the Holy One did not ask their permission to blot them out (Hizkuni). He said this to Noah; see v. 13. Or perhaps it is comparable to "God said" in the story of creation, an expression of God's will (Gersonides). **Men together with beasts.** The animals had done nothing wrong; they did not have the intelligence to do so. They were collateral damage (Gersonides). **I regret that I made them.** There are three kinds of "regret": someone who lies and promises to do what he has no intention of doing; someone who is simply unable to do what he promised; and a third kind, where the failure to come through is not on the part of the one who promised, but on the part of those he made the promise to. The third kind (only) can indeed apply to the Holy One (Bekhor Shor).

8 But Noah found favor with the LORD. "Noah" (נח) and "favor" (חן) are reversals in Hebrew, something the language likes to do with both good people and bad ones, as we see from 37:8, where "Er" (ער) was "displeasing" (רע) to the Lord (Bekhor Shor). The "favor" he found was that his sons and daughters were also saved. For in Ezek. 14:20 we read, "should Noah, Daniel, and Job be in [a land that was to be punished], as I live—declares the Lord GOD—they would save neither son nor daughter; they would save themselves alone by their righteousness" (Sforno).

I finished my commentary on this section at the end of the month of Av, 5088—a remarkably short time, when you consider the difficulties posed by all the previous commentaries, which themselves would have been sufficient to keep us from the truth, as anyone who compares my words and theirs will see. All praise to God, who was our help (Gersonides).

NJPS [9]This is the line of Noah.—Noah was a righteous man; he was blameless in his age; Noah walked with God.—[10]Noah begot three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

OJPS [9]These are the generations of Noah. Noah was in his generations a man righteous and whole-hearted; Noah walked with God. [10]And Noah begot three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

9 אֵ֚לֶּה תּוֹלְדֹ֣ת נֹ֔חַ נֹ֖חַ אִ֣ישׁ צַדִּ֑יק תָּמִ֥ים
הָיָ֖ה בְּדֹרֹתָ֑יו אֶת־הָאֱלֹהִ֖ים הִתְהַלֶּךְ־נֹֽחַ׃
10 וַיּ֥וֹלֶד נֹ֖חַ שְׁלֹשָׁ֣ה בָנִ֑ים אֶת־שֵׁ֥ם אֶת־חָ֖ם
וְאֶת־יָֽפֶת׃

RASHI **9 This is the line of Noah.—Noah was a righteous man.** Having mentioned him, the text speaks in praise of him: "The name of the righteous is invoked in blessing" (Prov. 10:7). Another reading: preceding this phrase with "the generations" of Noah (see OJPS) teaches you that the essence of what the righteous "generate" is their good deeds. **In his age.** Some of our Sages explain that this was said in praise of Noah. Even in his corrupt generation he was righteous. How much more righteous he would have been in a righteous age! Others think it is intended to disparage Noah. In his own generation Noah was the most righteous, but in Abraham's generation Noah would have been considered a nothing. **Noah walked with God.** The same special form of the verb is used with Abraham, but with a different preposition. The Lord said to Abram, "Walk *before* Me" (17:1), and he himself later said, "I have walked *before*" the Lord (24:40). Noah walked *with* Him because he needed something to support him; Abraham, fortifying himself with his righteousness, was able to walk *before* Him, on his own. Note, by the way, that the past tense "walked" here and the imperative "walk" of 17:1 have exactly the same form in Hebrew. That is characteristic of this form of the verb; see (e.g.) 1 Sam. 12:19 and 1 Kings 8:42.

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Since the Torah has already described "the line of Noah" (v. 9) in 5:32, why must that information be repeated here in v. 10?

RASHBAM **9 This is the line of Noah.** His descendants. **[A]**

[A] See Rashbam's comment to 37:2.

IBN EZRA **9 This is the line of Noah.** Rather, "this is the story of Noah." Compare "you do not know what [events] the day will *bring*" (Prov. 27:1). The same is true for "this is the line of Jacob" (37:2). **A righteous man.** In his actions. **He was blameless.** In his heart. **In his age.** The Hebrew literally says "in his generations" (OJPS)—in his own generation, at the time of the Flood, and in the generations that followed his, for he lived until Abraham was 58 years old. This is easy to remember because the numerical value of "Noah" in Hebrew is 58. **Noah walked with God.** **[A]**

[A] See Ibn Ezra's comment to "Enoch walked with God" (5:24).

KIMHI **9 Noah was a righteous man.** The opposite of the others of his generation, who were men of violence. **He was blameless.** Of "perfect" integrity. But a midrash understands "perfect" to mean that he was born circumcised. **Noah walked with God.** He cleaved to Him and acted in all his behavior for His sake. It took great effort to have his intellect overcome his nature in this way, for he lived in a generation so wicked that he alone managed to avoid learning their ways, and served God. Note that, for stylistic reasons, the name Noah is repeated three times in this verse; compare Num. 8:19, where Israel occurs five times.

10 Noah begot three sons. We have already been told this in 5:32; it is repeated now, after we have been told that he "walked with God," to indicate that he raised his sons to serve God as well. Had they not done so, they would not have been saved: "O mortal, if a land

NAHMANIDES **9 This is the line of Noah.** The phrase has been explained to mean "this [the narrative that follows] is the story of Noah." But in my view that is incorrect. The things that happen to someone are not necessarily "generated" by him. In fact it means what it literally says, just as 10:1 describes the "lines" or "generations" of Noah's sons and 25:12 the "line" of Ishmael. Here too, v. 10 lists Noah's sons. **Noah was a righteous man; he was blameless.** He was perfectly righteous and therefore deserved to be rescued from the Flood. He had no punishment coming to him. In Hebrew, the same word means both "righteous" and "innocent" (in a legal sense): "When there is a dispute between men and they go to law, and a decision is rendered declaring the one in the *right* and the other in the wrong" (Deut. 25:1). The root itself has a broader meaning; see 18:19, where a different root refers to justice and ours to mercy. Ibn Ezra distinguishes between "righteous" in deed and "blameless" in thought, but note what Ezekiel says to the prince of Tyre: "You were blameless in your ways" (Ezek. 28:15)—your behavior. **In his age.** See Rashi's comment. But in my view this is telling us that he was the only righteous man in his age; 7:1 says the same. There was no one else who deserved to be saved in any of the "generations" (OJPS) since they had begun to act corruptly. The midrash about Methuselah does not contradict this. **[A] Noah walked with God.** He feared Him only and was not lured after "the scanners of heaven" (Isa. 47:13) or diviners and soothsayers, much less after idolatry. He did not listen to them at all, but held fast to the Holy One, following the path that He chose, that He would teach him. For Noah was a prophet. I will speak further of this idiom in my comment to "Walk in My ways and be blameless" (17:1) if the One that is perfect in knowledge is with me; for now, see "Walk after none but the LORD your God, and revere none but Him" (Deut. 13:5).

10 Noah begot three sons. This resumes the "line" of Noah after the interruption to describe him as righteous, which explains why the Holy One commanded him to build the ark. We have already been told about his begetting these sons in 5:32; the repetition here

[A] See Rashi's comment to "in seven days' time" (7:4).

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **9 This is the line of Noah.** Wherever it says "this" rather than "and this," a contrast with what comes previously is implied. Here the contrast is with v. 5 (Hizkuni). This would be a second beginning for humanity (Abarbanel). **Noah was a righteous man.** This explains v. 8, where "Noah found favor with the LORD" (Hizkuni). Not just "righteous," but a righteous "man," someone of status in his society (Abarbanel). **In his age.** That is, "in his generations" (OJPS), the generations through which he had lived in the course of his 500 years (Gersonides). Rather, in all the different "ages" that he himself passed through: youth, maturity, and old age. If one takes "generation" as the length of a human life, Noah obviously lived through only one of those, his own (Abarbanel). The "generations" of Methuselah and Lamech before him, his own generation, and those of the children his contemporaries fathered (Sforno). **Noah walked with God.** Not "before" God, which would have told us that he followed God out of love; rather, he walked with God and not with the others of his generation (Abarbanel). That is, he finally decided to try to improve things and reproach the others (Sforno).

10 Noah begot three sons. Through divine providence; if he had had more, some of them would surely have followed the others of that generation. With just three, Noah could keep an eye on them. That is also why he did not have daughters, who would have married

NJPS [11]The earth became corrupt before God; the earth was filled with lawlessness. [12]When God saw how corrupt the earth was, for all flesh had corrupted its ways on earth, [13]God said to Noah, "I have decided to put an end to all flesh, for the earth is filled with lawlessness because of them:

11 וַתִּשָּׁחֵת הָאָרֶץ לִפְנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים וַתִּמָּלֵא
הָאָרֶץ חָמָס׃ 12 וַיַּרְא אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאָרֶץ
וְהִנֵּה נִשְׁחָתָה כִּי־הִשְׁחִית כָּל־בָּשָׂר אֶת־
דַּרְכּוֹ עַל־הָאָרֶץ׃ ס 13 וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים
לְנֹחַ קֵץ כָּל־בָּשָׂר בָּא לְפָנַי כִּי־מָלְאָה
הָאָרֶץ חָמָס מִפְּנֵיהֶם וְהִנְנִי מַשְׁחִיתָם

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why must v. 12 tell us that the earth "was corrupt" (OJPS), precisely repeating what v. 11 has already told us? ✦ Since God sees everything, why tell us that "God saw" this?

OJPS [11]And the earth was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. [12]And God saw the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way upon the earth. [13]And God said unto Noah: "The end of all flesh is come before Me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will

RASHI **11 The earth became corrupt.** The Hebrew term implies not merely sexual immorality but also idolatry: "Be most careful . . . not to *act wickedly* and make for yourselves a sculptured image" (Deut. 4:15–16). **The earth was filled with lawlessness.** Robbery.

12 For all flesh had corrupted its ways. Even the animals were interbreeding—even the birds.

13 An end to all flesh. Wherever you find sexual immorality, mass destruction comes into the world, killing good and bad alike. **For the earth is filled with lawlessness.** So it

IBN EZRA **11 The earth became corrupt.** That is, the people on earth. The same idiom is found in "all the world came to Joseph" (41:57) and "if a land were to sin against Me" (Ezek. 14:13). **Before God.** Some say this means "in public"; others, that they acted corruptly in secret, in ways that were concealed so that no one could know except God. To me, the most plausible explanation is that the Torah is using human language here, so that everyone could understand. People were acting brazenly, like a slave who misbehaves in front of his master, showing no fear of him. Those who say that *elohim* here refers to human judges can be ignored. **Lawlessness.** Robbing, thieving, and seizing women by force.

12 All flesh had corrupted its ways. The tradition that this refers to interbreeding of species and perversion of the course of nature is correct. The midrash that they sinned by means of water and were therefore punished by means of water is also beautifully appropriate. Just as their water was both above and below, so was the water with which they were punished. **[B]**

13 I have decided to put an end to all flesh. More literally, "the end of all flesh is come before Me" (OJPS). "The end of all flesh" refers to their physical bodies; saying

[B] Ibn Ezra is referring to B. Sanh. 108b: "R. Hisda said: They sinned with something boiling [semen] and were punished with something boiling [the waters of the Flood]." The commentators agree that by "above and below" Ibn Ezra is hinting at sexual perversion, but they disagree on what specifically he had in mind.

KIMHI were to sin against Me and commit a trespass . . . even if these three men—Noah, Daniel, and Job—should be in it, they would by their righteousness save only themselves—declares the Lord GOD" (Ezek. 14:13–14).

11 Before God. He watches providentially over the lower beings, in general and sometimes even in detail. **The earth was filled with lawlessness.** The entire species was corrupt.

12 All flesh. All of humanity: "And new moon after new moon, and sabbath after sabbath, all flesh shall come to worship Me" (Isa. 66:23). **Its ways.** Its natural ways, according to which "a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, so that they become one flesh" (2:24).

13 I have decided to put an end to all flesh. Rather, "the end of all flesh is come before Me" (OJPS), which could mean either the time to destroy them or the end of the

NAHMANIDES serves to emphasize that, unlike his ancestors, he did not beget daughters and sons, but just sons—and only these three. Even they were saved from the Flood only by Noah's merits and not their own. It would certainly have been an undeserved punishment for Noah to have all his children die. But conceivably we are being told that he begot three sons as righteous as he (having been brought up by him), as in the case of Abraham: "I have singled him out, that he may instruct his children and his posterity to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is just and right" (18:19). **Shem, Ham, and Japheth.** It seems to me that 10:21 tells us Japheth was the oldest; note that Japheth's descendants are listed first in that chapter. And 9:24 tells us that Ham was the youngest. But Shem is given precedence here as the most important. Ham, who followed him in birth order, is listed next even though that means Japheth is left for last. The text did not want to completely ignore birth order, and Japheth was not important enough to override it on his account. But Shem was, even though his descendants are listed last in ch. 10. Other sons are also listed out of birth order: "The sons of Abraham: Isaac and Ishmael" (1 Chron. 1:28); "to Isaac I gave Jacob and Esau" (Josh. 24:4).

12 For all flesh had corrupted its ways on earth. If we take "all flesh" literally, we would have to say, as does Rashi, that even the birds and beasts were having intercourse outside their species. Do we then say that "the earth is filled with lawlessness because of them" (v. 13) refers only to some of "them" (the humans from whose perspective the actual punishment is described), or do we say that even with regard to lawlessness all flesh was guilty, the beasts being all carnivorous and the birds all birds of prey? But in a straightforward reading, "all flesh" refers to all of humanity. Admittedly, both v. 19 and 7:15 use "all flesh" to refer to animals as well, but they say so explicitly; in our verse, without additional specification, it refers to human beings only. See similarly "All flesh shall come to worship Me" (Isa. 66:23). Lev. 13:24 makes clear that "flesh" can refer to humans.

13 Lawlessness. Specifically referring to robbery and fraud. Note that the Holy One tells Noah this is the reason, not the sexual corruption of v. 12. Lawlessness is an obvious, public sin. The Sages, however, explain that lawlessness sealed their doom. The command

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS out (Abarbanel). He begot sons only once he began to reproach the wicked (Sforno). **Shem, Ham, and Japheth.** Shem is listed first because of his prominence; since he was the youngest, the other two are listed in order of increasing age (Gersonides).

11 The earth became corrupt before God. Violating the commandments between man and God (Abarbanel). **The earth was filled with lawlessness.** Violating the commandments between man and man (Abarbanel).

12 When God saw how corrupt the earth was. How the world had been corrupted by human behavior (Abarbanel). When evil goes unpunished, the world becomes more and more corrupt (Sforno). **All flesh had corrupted its ways.** They did not follow the rule of law but that of power (Bekhor Shor).

13 God said. The Hebrew phrase occurs only 25 times in the Bible (Masorah). **The earth is filled with lawlessness.** The landowners rob the sharecroppers by force, and the sharecroppers cheat the landowners (Sforno). **Because of them.** On their own account;

NJPS I am about to destroy them with the earth. 14Make yourself an ark of gopher wood; make it an ark with compartments, and cover it inside and out with pitch. 15This is how you shall make it: the length of the ark shall be three hundred cubits, its width fifty cubits, and its height

אֶת־הָאָרֶץ׃ 14 עֲשֵׂה לְךָ֖ תֵּבַ֣ת עֲצֵי־גֹ֑פֶר
קִנִּ֤ים תַּעֲשֶׂה֙ אֶת־הַתֵּבָ֔ה וְכָפַרְתָּ֥ אֹתָ֛הּ
מִבַּ֥יִת וּמִח֖וּץ בַּכֹּֽפֶר׃ 15 וְזֶ֥ה אֲשֶׁר֙ תַּעֲשֶׂ֣ה
אֹתָ֔הּ שְׁלֹ֥שׁ מֵא֛וֹת אַמָּ֖ה אֹ֣רֶךְ הַתֵּבָ֑ה
חֲמִשִּׁ֤ים אַמָּה֙ רָחְבָּ֔הּ וּשְׁלֹשִׁ֥ים אַמָּ֖ה

OJPS destroy them with the earth. 14Make thee an ark of gopher wood; with rooms shalt thou make the ark, and shalt pitch it within and without with pitch. 15And this is how thou shalt make it: the length of the ark three hundred cubits, the breadth of it fifty cubits, and the height of

RASHI was robbery that sealed the verdict against them. **With the earth**. Rather, "from the earth." Compare "As I go out *from* the city" (Exod. 9:29); "he suffered *from* a foot ailment" (1 Kings 15:23). Another reading: They were really destroyed along "with" some of the earth. Three handbreadths of the topsoil was washed away—the depth of a plowshare.

14 Make yourself an ark. The Holy One had many ways of providing him with "relief and deliverance" (Esther 4:14). Why did He put him to the trouble of building an ark? So that the others of that generation would see him working on it—it took him 120 years—and ask him, "What are you doing?" He would tell them, "The Holy One is going to bring a Flood upon the earth," and perhaps they would repent. **Of gopher wood**. That just happens to be its name. But why did it have to be made of that particular wood? Because the others had been condemned to be wiped out by *gophrit*, sulfurous fire. **[A] With compartments**. Separate cabins for each different animal. **Cover it inside and out with pitch**. As we see from the Talmud, our word is the Aramaic equivalent of the word used in the story of Moses: "She got a wicker basket for him and caulked it with bitumen and *pitch*" (Exod. 2:3). There, however, the bitumen was on the inside and the pitch on the outside, because the waters of the Nile were gentle, and also to prevent that righteous infant from having to smell the pitch. Here, though, because the waters were stronger, it was caulked with pitch "inside and out."

[A] According to Jewish tradition, the waters of the Flood were boiling; see Nahmanides' comments to 7:23 and 8:5.

IBN EZRA that it had "come before Me" means that the time for their ultimate calamity **[C]** was about to arrive. **With the earth**. Despite the usage in Exod. 9:29 suggesting that this should be "*from* the earth," "with" may be correct, as it is in "the sons of Israel who came to Egypt *with* Jacob" (Exod. 1:1). But I think it is marking a second direct object of the verb: "I am about to destroy them [and] the earth." See the Hebrew of the phrase "your divine throne" (Ps. 45:7) for another example where a word with a suffix implicitly also governs the next word in the sentence.

14 Gopher wood. The Hebrew term is a hapax legomenon, unique in the Bible. This is a light wood that could float easily on the water. **An ark**. Notice that it is not "a boat." It was not built like a ship, and it had no oars. They were not going anywhere. **With compartments**. So that each male-and-female pair of birds and beasts could be by themselves; some of them, after all, were predators. **Cover it**. Some do understand it this way; others (like OJPS) take the verb to mean "pitch it," that is, "coat it with pitch." Others think what was used was a kind of clay that could caulk the surface like pitch; still others relate the word to a similar word in Arabic that replaces the כ with a ק. In fact, OJPS is correct.

15 This is how you shall make it. That is, "these are the dimensions to which you shall make it." **The length of the ark shall be three hundred cubits, its width fifty cubits, and its height thirty cubits**. Ten times longer than it was high, so that it could float on the water without being capsized by the wind.

[C] This is an unusual expression; a possible alternative reading (different by one Hebrew letter) is: "the time for the end of Man."

KIMHI time set for them to repent. But instead of doing so, they acted even more corruptly. **I am about to destroy them**. The Hebrew verb is the same as in "all flesh had *corrupted* its ways" of v. 12.

14 Make yourself an ark. Make it of your own free will. For of course he would make it not only for himself but for the other creatures he would save. **Gopher wood**. Onkelos translates it as "cedar." **Compartments**. Like those in a dovecote. **Cover it inside and out with pitch**. So that if the outside layer should be breached by the force of the water the inner layer would still protect it.

15 The length of the ark shall be three hundred cubits, its width fifty cubits, and its height thirty cubits. According to Genesis Rabbah, it is a general rule that when you make a boat the width should be one-sixth of the length and the height should be one-tenth of the length.

NAHMANIDES against robbery is one that any rational person could figure out. They had no need for a prophet to warn them against it. Moreover, it is as evil to people as it is to God. So He was informing Noah of the sin for which the time had come and "the cycle had come around" (Ezek. 7:7). **I am about to destroy them with the earth**. See the comments of Rashi (which come from Genesis Rabbah) and Ibn Ezra. According to the Way of Truth, "the earth" here is like "the earth" of 1:1. **[B]** With the destruction of that "world," they too will be destroyed, both in this world and in the World to Come. This follows the same line of thought as "His heart was saddened" (6:6). The parable in Genesis Rabbah of the prince's nurse alludes to this: whenever the prince (humanity) did wrong, his nurse (the earth) was punished.

15 The length of the ark shall be three hundred cubits. In standard Torah cubits; see my first comment to v. 19.

[B] That is, the upper "world."

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS they deliberately chose evil (Gersonides). **I am about to destroy them with the earth**. Them, along with the animals and birds and trees and grass (Bekhor Shor). With their "earthly," material, aspect (Abarbanel). I will destroy the earth along with them, moving the sun away from the equator to change the climate and shorten life (Sforno).

14 Make yourself an ark. Not a boat or ship, but an ark: a (triangular) box (Abarbanel). **Gopher wood**. Which is long lasting (Gersonides). **Compartments**. Literally "nests," but see Obad. 1:4 and Job 29:18 for this word used with something other than a bird (Gersonides).

15 This is how you shall make it. There had to be enough room for all the animals, for their feed, and for their waste (Gersonides). **The length of the ark shall be three hundred cubits, its width fifty cubits, and its height thirty cubits**. It was prophetically revealed to Noah that these dimensions would make the ark large enough. These are standard cubits, each of six handbreadths (Gersonides).

NJPS thirty cubits. [16]Make an opening for daylight in the ark, and terminate it within a cubit of the top. Put the entrance to the ark in its side; make it with bottom, second, and third decks.

[17]"For My part, I am about to bring the Flood—waters upon the earth—to destroy all flesh under the sky in which there is breath of life; everything on earth shall

צֹהַר | תַּעֲשֶׂה לַתֵּבָה וְאֶל־ 16 קוֹמָתָהּ תְּכַלֶּנָּה מִלְמַעְלָה וּפֶתַח הַתֵּבָה אַמָּהּ בְּצִדָּהּ תָּשִׂים תַּחְתִּיִּם שְׁנִיִּם וּשְׁלִשִׁים תַּעֲשֶׂהָ׃

17 וַאֲנִי הִנְנִי מֵבִיא אֶת־הַמַּבּוּל מַיִם עַל־ הָאָרֶץ לְשַׁחֵת כָּל־בָּשָׂר אֲשֶׁר־בּוֹ רוּחַ חַיִּים מִתַּחַת הַשָּׁמָיִם כֹּל אֲשֶׁר־בָּאָרֶץ

OJPS it thirty cubits. [16]A light shalt thou make to the ark, and to a cubit shalt thou finish it upward; and the door of the ark shalt thou set in the side thereof; with lower, second, and third stories shalt thou make it.

[17]And I, behold, I do bring the flood of waters upon the earth, to destroy all flesh, wherein is the breath of life, from under heaven; every thing that is in the earth

RASHI **16 An opening for daylight.** NJPS follows those who take the Hebrew word to mean "window"; OJPS "light" follows those who think it refers to a precious stone that would shine on them. **And terminate it within a cubit of the top.** The cover of the ark sloped upward, leaving an opening at the top of just one cubit, so that the water could slide off on either side. **Put the entrance to the ark in its side.** So that the rain would not fall into it. **Make it with bottom, second, and third decks.** The top deck for the people, the middle deck for the animals to live, and the bottom deck for the dung.

17 For My part, I am about to bring. I am about ready to agree with the angels who long ago so pointedly asked Me, "What is man that You have been mindful of him?" (Ps. 8:5). **The Flood.** The Hebrew *mabul* hints that the Flood "wrecked" everything (*billah*), "muddled" everything (*bilbel*), and "brought" everything (*hobil*) to ruin, washing everything high down to the bottom. In fact, when the waters drained out, all those who died in the Flood were washed down to Babylonia, which is a low point. See my comment to 10:10.

KIMHI **16 Make an opening for daylight in the ark.** To be used once the rain stopped. Some of our Sages understand the Hebrew word to indicate a precious stone that would glow to provide light, but the instruction to "make" it argues against that. In reality, Noah certainly provided oil for a lamp along with all the other supplies he prepared.

17 The Flood—waters upon the earth. The Hebrew word *mabul* ("Flood") derives from נבל, the same root used in the expression "*wilted* of leaf" (Isa. 1:30); its basic meaning is "to fall," and it can be used of anything that falls from the sky, including snow, fire, and hail. So the expression really means "a fall of waters." One never finds the expression "a rain of waters," because rain can only be water. But a "fall" of this kind can be specified as "a fall of waters." **Everything on earth shall perish.** I would have thought "all flesh under the sky" included the fish as well; this phrase comes to clarify that only what is "on earth," that is, on dry land, would perish.

NAHMANIDES **17 For My part, I am about to bring the Flood.** Rashi's comment (which he took from Genesis Rabbah) is puzzling. In what sense is He agreeing with the angels, when He is leaving enough of a remnant (in the persons of Noah and his family, not to mention all the animals) to provide them with an "extraordinary deliverance" (45:7), to have as many descendants as the grains of sand on the shore? Perhaps He is agreeing with the angels to the extent that He will show those living now no mercy. But in Truth the pronoun here (see OJPS; the second "I" is simply a suffix) is the same as that of "As for Me, this is My covenant with you" (17:4); "I, for My part, will discipline you sevenfold for your sins" (Lev. 26:28); and "As for Me, this shall be My covenant with them" (Isa. 59:21). He is saying, "My hand, too, shall be against them because they have corrupted the earth." That is why the pronoun also appears in "This is the sign that *I* set for the covenant" (9:12). "He wounds, but His hands heal" (Job 5:18). One who is enlightened will understand. **[C]**

[C] See the first paragraph of Nahmanides' comment to Lev. 26:16.

IBN EZRA **16 An opening for daylight.** Compare the etymologically related word "noon." Obviously this opening would have to be at the top of the ark. **Terminate it within a cubit of the top.** More precisely, it would have a length of one cubit at the top and would therefore be one-sixth of a cubit wide. **[D]** The ark was triangular, sloping up to a sharp edge at the top (and at the corners), so that it would not capsize. **Put the entrance to the ark in its side.** On just one of the sides, accessed by a ladder. Knowing that the ark was so big, we might similarly assume that Noah was of greater stature that we are, and that the "cubit" mentioned here—really the measure of a man's forearm, which the Hebrew word also means—was made to his measure, not ours. **Make it with bottom, second, and third decks.** Based on v. 15, we presume that each deck was 10 cubits high. But it may be, as some think, that the text is idiomatically saying that there were many, many decks. Some wonder why "third" does not have a *dagesh* in the ו as does "second." "They have eyes, but cannot see!" (Ps. 135:16). Each word has its own particular pattern, and "third" does not have the same pattern as "second," though it does match a number of other Hebrew words. Or perhaps the *dagesh* of "second" applies to "third" as well. Maybe that would set their minds at ease.

17 The Flood. Some take the Hebrew word, *mabul*, to be from נבל, as *mabu'a* of Eccles. 12:6 ("the spring") is from נבע; that root is found (twice) in "The earth is *withered, sear*" of Isa. 24:4. Others think it is from בלל, "to mix," but that would call for *mablul*, as in *maslul* of "a *highway* shall appear there" (Isa. 35:8). One might compare *mashor* of "Does a *saw* magnify itself above him who wields it?" (Isa. 10:15), since *o* and *u* vowels regularly interchange. **Waters upon the earth.** The syntax here is really "the Flood—[a Flood of] waters upon the earth" (compare OJPS). The text regularly omits an implied second repetition of the same word. For a similar example, see the Hebrew of "from the day it was founded" (Exod. 9:18).

[D] This is the proportion of length to width given in v. 15.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **16 Make an opening for daylight.** Rather, a *tzohar*, a "light" (OJPS), in which to burn *yitzhar*, olive oil (Hizkuni). **Bottom, second, and third decks.** The third, top, deck was for the people and the food (Hizkuni).

17 For My part, I am about to bring the Flood. Etymologically, the word means "chaos"—something water is quite capable of creating (Gersonides). This was to let Noah know the Flood was a matter of divine providence, not a natural occurrence (Abarbanel). You make the ark; I will bring the Flood (Sforno).

NJPS perish. [18]But I will establish My covenant with you, and you shall enter the ark, with your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives. [19]And of all that lives, of all flesh, you shall take two of each into the ark to keep alive with you; they shall be male and female. [20]From birds of every kind, cattle of every kind, every kind of creeping thing

יִגְוָע׃ 18 וַהֲקִמֹתִי אֶת־בְּרִיתִי אִתָּךְ וּבָאתָ
אֶל־הַתֵּבָה אַתָּה וּבָנֶיךָ וְאִשְׁתְּךָ וּנְשֵׁי־בָנֶיךָ
אִתָּךְ׃ 19 וּמִכָּל־הָחַי מִכָּל־בָּשָׂר שְׁנַיִם
מִכֹּל תָּבִיא אֶל־הַתֵּבָה לְהַחֲיֹת אִתָּךְ זָכָר
וּנְקֵבָה יִהְיוּ׃ 20 מֵהָעוֹף לְמִינֵהוּ וּמִן־
הַבְּהֵמָה לְמִינָהּ מִכֹּל רֶמֶשׂ הָאֲדָמָה

RASHI **18 But I will establish My covenant.** The covenant was needed to prevent the fruit they would bring along from rotting and growing moldy, and also to keep the wicked ones of that generation from killing him. **You shall enter the ark, with your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives.** The men and women are grouped separately. We learn from this that they were forbidden to have sex on the ark.

19 Of all that lives. Including demons. **Two of each.** At least two of even the most insignificant of them—one male and one female.

20 From birds of every kind. Those that stuck with their own kind and did not

KIMHI **18 But I will establish My covenant with you.** That you and all that is with you will escape the Flood. **You shall enter the ark, with your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives.** Our Sages say this expression hints they did not engage in sex on the ark. They would have to eat to keep themselves alive, but it would be quite inappropriate to occupy yourself with physical pleasures while the rest of the world was being destroyed all around you.

19 Take two of each into the ark. After they have "come to you to stay alive" (v. 20), which the Holy One would give them the instinct to do, just as they have an instinct to seek out food and water.

NAHMANIDES **18 But I will establish My covenant with you.** See Ibn Ezra's comment. In my view, it is more correct to take it as "I will *uphold* My covenant," that is, "My promise that you will survive the Flood." The word "covenant" here means a unilateral, unconditional divine decree. The language is similar to that in "the Jews *undertook and irrevocably obligated* themselves and their descendants" (Esther 9:27). But according to the Way of Truth, the covenant has existed eternally; *brit* is derived from *bara*, "[God] created." "My covenant" is essentially the same as "My creation," a word whose connected, construct form is almost identical with it. For the covenant is connected to what "occurred long since, in ages that went by before us" (Eccles. 1:10). The Holy One is decreeing here that this promise will be with the righteous man irrevocably, just as in "I now establish My covenant with you and your offspring to come" (9:9) and "I had with him a covenant of life and well-being" (Mal. 2:5). Again, one who is enlightened will understand.

19 And of all that lives, of all flesh, you shall take two of each. It is well known that there are many species of animals, some of them as big as oxen and elephants, along with innumerable species of birds and insects. As the Sages said: There are 120 species of unclean birds in the east alone, each of which is one variety or another of falcon. As for the clean birds, they are innumerable. And Noah would have to get two of each of them, not to mention enough food to feed them for a year. Ten arks could not contain them all. But the actual ark was miraculous; its interior was much larger than its exterior. You might think he would have made it even smaller, relying on this miracle, but the Holy One wanted it big enough to make the others of his generation wonder about it. He wanted them to discuss the Flood and the gathering of the animals, hoping they would repent. And of course it was also made large to limit the scope of the miracle. All the miracles in the Torah and the Prophets are of this kind: the people involved do as much as they can and leave the rest in the hands of heaven. It is true that "cubit" literally means "forearm," but do not make the mistake of thinking that the 300 cubits (see v. 15) refer specifically to the length of Noah's forearm, and that he must therefore have been an enormous man. If he had been, all the others of that age, and the antediluvian animals too, would have been of comparable size. The cubits used here are standard Torah cubits. **Into the ark to keep alive with you.** Noah must actively assist them into the ark and exert his best efforts to keep them alive, just as he would do for himself.

20 Two of each shall come to you to stay alive. They would come of their own accord and then he would take them into the

OJPS shall perish. [18]But I will establish My covenant with thee; and thou shalt come into the ark, thou, and thy sons, and thy wife, and thy sons' wives with thee. [19]And of every living thing of all flesh, two of every sort shalt thou bring into the ark, to keep them alive with thee; they shall be male and female. [20]Of the fowl after their kind, and of the cattle after their kind, of every creeping thing of the ground after its

IBN EZRA **18 But I will establish My covenant with you.** Rather, "I will uphold My covenant." For He had sworn to him that he and his sons would not die in the Flood. This has not previously been stated explicitly, but we find something similar when the Israelites tell Moses, "Let us send men ahead to reconnoiter" (Deut. 1:22). **[E]** But I find it plausible that the comment here refers to the "bow" of 9:13. Etymologically, *brit* ("covenant") is related to the verb *barah*, as in "*Choose* one of your men" (1 Sam. 17:8). But there are some who derive it from the verb *batar* ("cut"), as in "cutting" a deal.

19 Of all that lives, of all flesh. This is a general statement; the specifics are given in v. 20. **You shall take.** Noah was commanded not to leave them behind, but to take them with him, to preserve the seed of every species. **Two of each.** As is subsequently clarified, this means one male and one female.

20 Every kind of creeping thing on earth. A general term including all land

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ How could God say in v. 18 (as He does, despite the translations), "I will *uphold* My covenant with you," when we have not been told yet of any such covenant?

[E] This is not recorded when the story is first told in Numbers 13.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **18 But I will establish My covenant with you.** Rather, "uphold" My covenant—the covenant the Holy One made on the seventh day of creation to let the world continue in existence without the necessity of divine intervention. Conceivably the Holy One had also made a covenant with Noah that the text simply does not mention, but the first explanation is a better one (Gersonides). The covenant being upheld here is the one by which the Holy One set "a boundary to the sea, as a limit for all time, not to be transgressed" (Jer. 5:22). He was telling Noah that the wicked did not deserve to have this covenant upheld for them, but that He would uphold it for Noah (Abarbanel). I will establish My covenant with you after the Flood (Sforno). **You . . . your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives.** The males are listed first because they are the essence of creation; the females were to serve them, and to propagate the species (Gersonides).

19 Two of each. Rather, "every sort by twos." At this point, all Noah is being told is that, however many animals of each kind he would bring into the ark, they must be in male-and-female pairs (Abarbanel).

20 From birds of every kind, cattle of every kind. Listed in the order in which they were created (Hizkuni).

NJPS on earth, two of each shall come to you to stay alive. [21]For your part, take of everything that is eaten and store it away, to serve as food for you and for them." [22]Noah did so; just as God commanded him, so he did.

7 Then the LORD said to Noah, "Go into the ark, with all your household, for you alone have I found righteous before

לְמִינֵהוּ שְׁנַיִם מִכֹּל יָבֹאוּ אֵלֶיךָ לְהַחֲיוֹת׃
21 וְאַתָּה קַח־לְךָ מִכָּל־מַאֲכָל אֲשֶׁר יֵאָכֵל
וְאָסַפְתָּ אֵלֶיךָ וְהָיָה לְךָ וְלָהֶם לְאָכְלָה׃
22 וַיַּעַשׂ נֹחַ כְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה אֹתוֹ אֱלֹהִים
כֵּן עָשָׂה׃ ס

שני

ז וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה לְנֹחַ בֹּא־אַתָּה וְכָל־בֵּיתְךָ
אֶל־הַתֵּבָה כִּי־אֹתְךָ רָאִיתִי צַדִּיק לְפָנַי

OJPS kind, two of every sort shall come unto thee, to keep them alive. [21]And take thou unto thee of all food that is eaten, and gather it to thee; and it shall be for food for thee, and for them." [22]Thus did Noah; according to all that God commanded him, so did he.

7 And the LORD said unto Noah: "Come thou and all thy house into the ark; for thee have I seen righteous before Me in

RASHI interbreed. **Two of each shall come to you.** They came on their own. He let in all the ones that the ark would admit. **[B]**

22 Noah did so. That is, he built the ark.

7:1 Go into the ark. Rather, "go to the ark." **[C] For you alone have I found righteous.** Not "righteous and blameless" as he was described in 6:9. We learn from this that one should offer partial praise in someone's presence and full praise only when the person is absent.

[B] Those that had not interbred. **[C]** See Rashi's comments to vv. 5 and 7.

KIMHI **21 Everything that is eaten.** Fruit, seeds, and grasses, which the carnivorous animals would also eat.

22 Noah did so. He made the ark and carried out all the preparations as instructed.

7:1 Go into the ark. He warned him to do this before the Flood came. **For you alone have I found righteous before Me.** You and your family are destined to escape the Flood in order to resettle the world.

NAHMANIDES ark. He would not need to trap them in the hills and the islands. And 7:9 tells us that they actually did come to him.

22 Noah did so; just as God commanded him, so he did. He made the ark and collected the feed. It is a habit of the text to repeat the phrases "he did so" and "so he did" to make clear that not one thing the person had been commanded to do was omitted.

7:1 Then the LORD said to Noah. The use of "the LORD" indicates that the Holy One was telling Noah that He would save him and his family from the Flood through the attribute of mercy and "keep seed alive upon all the earth" (v. 3) for future generations. For originally He said merely "to keep alive" (6:19), with no reference to offspring. But now, by means of the attribute of mercy, He informed Noah that he should make preparations to offer sacrifices, through whose merit He would keep the world in existence and never again let it be destroyed by a Flood. All this explains why the Tetragrammaton is used here. As I hope to explain in my comments to Leviticus, **[D]** that name—not "God"—is always associated with sacrifices. **Go into the ark, with all your household.** Noah finished the ark long before the Flood. Now, on the 10th day of the 2nd month, when the time for the Flood was approaching, He commanded him to go into the ark, as he had told him in 6:18 that they would. **For you alone have I found righteous before Me in this generation.** "You" is singular, referring to Noah alone, not to the rest of the family.

[D] See Nahmanides' comment to Lev. 1:9.

IBN EZRA animals, large or small, that are born from the coupling of male and female; those that reproduce nonsexually are therefore excluded, as are sea creatures. For otherwise we would have assumed that "flesh" of v. 19 included fish, as we see from what Moses says to God: "You say, 'I will give them enough *flesh* to eat for a whole month.' Could enough flocks and herds be slaughtered to suffice them? Or could all the *fish* of the sea be gathered for them to suffice them?" (Num. 11:21–22). **Two of each shall come to you.** They would come to him on their own. He would not need to seek them in the islands or trap all the various species of birds.

21 For your part, take of everything that is eaten and store it away, to serve as food. Some mistaken people have asked what the birds of prey ate, or carnivorous species such as lions. But this is not even a question. One who cannot find flesh will eat grass or fruit if he is hungry enough. As for the midrash about an animal so big that it grazes on a thousand mountains . . . well, it is fun to listen to. And the bird so big that its wingspread eclipses the sun? That is symbolic, and not to be taken literally.

7:1 Go into the ark. Rather, "go to [the location of] the ark." He had constructed it secretly, hiding it from everyone.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **21 Everything that is eaten.** Since the ark would carry every kind of eater, it would also have to have every kind of food (Hizkuni). In fact, only plant food was eaten on the ark. Meat-eating engenders cruelty, while plant-eating diminishes it (Abarbanel). **To serve as food for you and for them.** It must have been in seed form to store enough for all of them and still leave seeds over that could be planted after the Flood (Gersonides). Since the humans were not permitted yet to eat meat, the animals were not either; the same food was to be "for you and for them" (Abarbanel).

22 Noah did so. He loaded the food supply (Hizkuni). The 120 years following these instructions gave him plenty of time to make the ark and look for the animals (Gersonides).

Noah must also have been told how long the Flood would last so that he could gather the necessary amount of food. He got the knowledge he needed for this task from Jabal, and he must have learned all the other professions as well. Otherwise those who created them (see 4:20–22) could not properly be called "the father of" such-and-such a group of artisans. If Noah (or one of his sons) had not learned these skills, they would have all died out in the Flood (Gersonides).

7:1 The LORD said to Noah. "The LORD said to" occurs just six other times with the inseparable preposition ל instead of the standard אל (Masorah). **Go into the ark.** Not once and for all; at this point Noah was to start going in and out of the ark (Abarbanel).

NJPS Me in this generation. [2]Of every clean animal you shall take seven pairs, males and their mates, and of every animal that is not clean, two, a male and its mate; [3]of the birds of the sky also, seven pairs, male and female, to keep seed alive upon all the earth. [4]For in seven days' time I will make it rain upon the earth,

OJPS this generation. [2]Of every clean beast thou shalt take to thee seven and seven, each with his mate; and of the beasts that are not clean two [and two], each with his mate; [3]of the fowl also of the air, seven and seven, male and female; to keep seed alive upon the face of all the earth. [4]For yet seven days, and I will cause it to rain upon the earth forty days

בַּדּוֹר הַזֶּה׃ [2] מִכֹּל | הַבְּהֵמָה הַטְּהוֹרָה
תִּקַּח־לְךָ שִׁבְעָה שִׁבְעָה אִישׁ וְאִשְׁתּוֹ
וּמִן־הַבְּהֵמָה אֲשֶׁר לֹא טְהֹרָה הִוא שְׁנַיִם
אִישׁ וְאִשְׁתּוֹ׃ [3] גַּם מֵעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם שִׁבְעָה
שִׁבְעָה זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה לְחַיּוֹת זֶרַע עַל־
פְּנֵי כָל־הָאָרֶץ׃ [4] כִּי לְיָמִים עוֹד שִׁבְעָה
אָנֹכִי מַמְטִיר עַל־הָאָרֶץ אַרְבָּעִים יוֹם

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ How can we resolve the contradiction between 6:19–20, where Noah is commanded to take "*two* of each" animal, and vv. 2–3 here, where he is told to take "*seven* pairs" of each clean animal?

RASHI **2 Every clean animal.** Those that would one day be clean for Jews. We thus learn that Noah learned Torah. **Seven pairs.** So that he could offer some of them as sacrifices when he came out of the ark.

3 Of the birds of the sky also, seven pairs. Implicitly, of the clean birds, as one can deduce from the explicit statement in v. 2.

4 In seven days' time. These were the seven days spent in mourning for Methuselah the righteous; the Holy One took care to delay the punishment out of respect for him. If you do the math, you will see that Methuselah's years come to an end precisely when Noah is 600 years old. The Hebrew actually says "in seven *more* days" (see "yet" of OJPS); these were seven more days added to the original 120 years of 6:3. **Forty days.** Corresponding to the 40 days it takes for an

IBN EZRA **2 Of every clean animal you shall take seven pairs.** Don't forget, the Holy One commanded Noah to prepare the ark many years before the Flood came. When the time approached, He commanded Noah and his family to enter the ark, and to take seven pairs of each clean animal, so they would have enough to make sacrificial offerings. And indeed He prefers the clean animals (though they are all His creatures).

4 For in seven days' time I will make it rain upon the earth. Since the rain began to fall "in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month" (v. 11), the Lord said this to him on the tenth. **Forty days**

KIMHI **2 Of every clean animal you shall take seven pairs.** The seven pairs were not all for Noah to offer up when he came out of the ark. Fewer than seven pairs would have been plenty, since we do not see him offering sacrifice more than once. If he did indeed offer sacrifice again, after a year or two he could have brought the offerings from the offspring of the animals he took onto the ark. In fact, the Holy One intended the seven pairs of clean animals to provide food for Noah and his descendants, since at this point He intended to permit the eating of meat, which had previously been forbidden. People were certainly not forbidden to eat the unclean animals until that prohibition was given to the Israelites (see 9:3). But the clean animals are generally better for human beings to eat, and indeed even the other nations do not generally eat the unclean animals except from hunger. It is pointless to ask, Why seven and not six or eight? The Holy One in His wisdom knew that seven was both necessary and sufficient, and that the ark would not hold more than this. **Males and their mates.** The Hebrew actually says "man and wife," but this is metaphoric. Similarly, the idiom for "each other" in Hebrew is (e.g.) "a woman and her sister," even when discussing inanimate objects (assuming they are grammatically feminine). But when the pair are of different genders, one says "man and wife." **Every animal that is not clean.** Why not simply say "every unclean animal"? Hebrew has a word for it. But this figure of speech is common in Biblical Hebrew. See, for example, the Hebrew of Deut. 23:11 and 1 Sam. 20:26 for "not clean," of 1 Sam. 2:24 and Ezek. 18:18 for "not good," and many others like them. It is all the same whether they speak about what is or what is not, though our Sages learn from this idiom that one should avoid negative words and always use positive ones.

3 To keep seed alive. This was the main reason for preserving both clean and unclean species, of course. Unlike the purpose of preserving the food supply, it had to be mentioned explicitly. **Upon all the earth.** See my first comment to 1:25.

4 In seven days' time. He warned him to prepare the compartments for each species and to load in the food while the ark was still open. (The midrash understands these "extra" seven days as the mourning period for Methuselah. And in fact Methuselah did die just before the Flood began; see my comment to 6:5.) **I will make it rain upon the earth.** There is no mention here of the fountains of v. 11. It is obvious that heavy rains would drench the earth and let the fountains of the deep, hidden under the dried surface, burst open just as

NAHMANIDES **2 Of every clean animal.** Which animals are "clean" is explained elsewhere in the Torah; here the word is simply used without explanation. The Holy One told Noah how to recognize which ones were clean, though this is left out of the narrative. Rashi says in his comment that this proves that Noah learned Torah; certainly we can derive that all the descendants of Noah were forbidden to sacrifice any animals or birds other than the clean ones. Even Abel had already brought "the choicest of the firstlings of his flock" (4:4) rather than any other kind. But all the clean species may be brought as sacrificial offerings: "Then Noah built an altar to the LORD and, taking of *every* clean animal and of *every* clean bird, he offered burnt offerings on the altar" (8:20). The commandment that the Israelites should present offerings only "from the herd or from the flock" (Lev. 1:2) or "from turtledoves or pigeons" (Lev. 1:14) was a later addition. **You shall take seven pairs.** The animals to be saved would indeed come on their own, but those that were to be sacrificed were not required to present themselves for slaughter; Noah had to "take" them. That was the reason for taking seven pairs of the clean animals—so that Noah could offer sacrifice from those species.

3 Of the birds of the sky also. "Also" indicates that this connects with the beginning of v. 2 and refers "also" to clean birds.

4 In seven days' time. He told him the precise day on which the Flood was to come, so he would know when to "go into the ark" (v. 1). And v. 13 confirms that they went into the ark on the "same day" that the Flood began.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **2 Of every clean animal you shall take seven pairs . . . and of every animal that is not clean, two.** Here, not in 6:19–20, is where Noah is instructed how many pairs of each kind of animal to take (Abarbanel).

4 I will make it rain upon the earth, forty days and forty nights. He told him how long the rain would last so he would not be afraid that it would never stop (Bekhor Shor). The forty days and forty nights corresponded to the "forty lashes" of Deut. 25:3 (Hizkuni). **Existence.** The Hebrew word occurs nowhere else but v. 23 and Deut. 11:6 (Masorah).

NJPS forty days and forty nights, and I will blot out from the earth all existence that I created." 5And Noah did just as the LORD commanded him.

6Noah was six hundred years old when the Flood came, waters upon the earth. 7Noah, with his sons, his wife, and his sons' wives, went into the ark because of the waters of the Flood. 8Of the clean animals, of the animals that are not clean, of the birds, and of everything that creeps on the ground, 9two of each, male and female, came to Noah into the ark, as God had commanded Noah. 10And

וְאַרְבָּעִים לָיְלָה וּמָחִיתִי אֶת־כָּל־הַיְקוּם
אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתִי מֵעַל פְּנֵי הָאֲדָמָה׃ 5 וַיַּעַשׂ
נֹחַ כְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר־צִוָּהוּ יְהוָה׃
6 וְנֹחַ בֶּן־שֵׁשׁ מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה וְהַמַּבּוּל הָיָה
מַיִם עַל־הָאָרֶץ׃ 7 וַיָּבֹא נֹחַ וּבָנָיו וְאִשְׁתּוֹ
וּנְשֵׁי־בָנָיו אִתּוֹ אֶל־הַתֵּבָה מִפְּנֵי מֵי
הַמַּבּוּל׃ 8 מִן־הַבְּהֵמָה הַטְּהוֹרָה וּמִן־
הַבְּהֵמָה אֲשֶׁר אֵינֶנָּה טְהֹרָה וּמִן־הָעוֹף
וְכֹל אֲשֶׁר־רֹמֵשׂ עַל־הָאֲדָמָה׃ 9 שְׁנַיִם
שְׁנַיִם בָּאוּ אֶל־נֹחַ אֶל־הַתֵּבָה זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה
כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה אֱלֹהִים אֶת־נֹחַ׃ 10 וַיְהִי

OJPS and forty nights; and every living substance that I have made will I blot out from off the face of the earth." 5And Noah did according unto all that the LORD commanded him.

6And Noah was six hundred years old when the flood of waters was upon the earth. 7And Noah went in, and his sons, and his wife, and his sons' wives with him, into the ark, because of the waters of the flood. 8Of clean beasts, and of beasts that are not clean, and of fowls, and of every thing that creepeth upon the ground, 9there went in two and two unto Noah into the ark, male and female, as God commanded Noah. 10And

RASHI embryo to become a fetus. For they had nefariously troubled the One who fashioned them by making Him form fetuses of mixed breed.

5 Noah did just as the LORD commanded him. He went to the ark.

7 Noah, with his sons, his wife, and his sons' wives. The men and women separately, since they were forbidden to have sex while the world was so immersed in misfortune. **Because of the waters of the Flood.** Noah too was among those of little faith, only half believing that the Flood would come. So he did not go into the ark until the water actually forced him to.

9 Two of each. That is, at least two of even the most insignificant. All species were treated alike to this extent. **Came to Noah.** They came on their own.

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why is the information in vv. 6–7 about Noah's age, their entering the ark, and the coming of the Flood repeated in vv. 11–13?

IBN EZRA **and forty nights.** After forty days, the middle one returns to the facing one—but all this is a mystery. **[F] All existence.** This noun is found nowhere else but in this passage. **[G]** It is a catchall term, referring to every living thing on earth. It derives from the root יקם, with a weak first consonant, though some take it from the hollow root קום, with metathesis of the first two radicals. You will find a similar phenomenon in "O LORD, *strive* with my *adversaries*" (Ps. 35:1). In any case, it only refers to "all existence" on land.

5 And Noah did just as the LORD commanded him. Bringing his family up to the ark.

7 Because of the waters of the Flood. Because of their fear of the waters of the Flood. During the seven days between the 10th and the 17th, many of the clean animals had come to Noah on their own, as had the clean birds. Of the others, pairs of males and females came.

9 Two of each . . . came to Noah. Noah could not possibly have gotten them all on his own, but the Holy One could easily arrange it: "The LORD commanded the fish" (Jon. 2:11).

[F] Ibn Ezra is hinting that the reason it would rain for 40 days is too technical for ordinary people to understand. He seems to mean that it indicates one and a half lunar cycles. "The middle one" apparently refers to the sun and "the facing one" to the moon. **[G]** In v. 23. But in fact it also occurs once in Deut. 11:6.

KIMHI they were at the beginning of creation. There is nothing unnatural about this; water, being lighter, would naturally rise above the earth. It is water staying beneath the earth that is unnatural, achieved by God's will.

5 And Noah did just as the LORD commanded him. Going into the ark with his family and bringing in the animals.

6 Noah was six hundred years old when the Flood came. The Hebrew says merely, "and" the Flood came; but the translations understand correctly.

7 Because of the waters of the Flood. Because they would be coming in another seven days. I cannot understand the reasoning of the Sage who said Noah lacked faith. **[A]** The text testifies that he was righteous and blameless and did everything the Holy One commanded him.

9 Two of each. More precisely, "two and two" (OJPS), that is, two pairs of each animal, each pair consisting of one male and one female.

[A] In Genesis Rabbah, R. Johanan says that Noah so lacked faith that he did not go into the ark until the water came up to his ankles.

NAHMANIDES **9 Two of each.** At least two, according to Rashi; but seven of "the clean animals" (v. 8). And others point out that going in "two and two" (OJPS) implies that the male and female of each species came together, as a pair. This is correct, in my opinion—that two of each species, one male and one female, came to Noah of their own accord. But Noah brought in six extra pairs of the clean species. **As God had commanded Noah.** Again, the animals that would be saved came on their own, but Noah made sure to be able to bring extra animals for the purpose of sacrifice, as he had been commanded. According to Genesis Rabbah, the repetition of 6:22 in v. 5 refers to this command to get extra pairs of the clean animals, and the third iteration, here in v. 9, refers to entering the ark. It is a continuation of v. 7. Noah and his family went into the ark—along with the various animals—as God had commanded Noah.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **5 Noah did just as the LORD commanded him.** At first the other family members were not helping him. But during the seven days it began to sprinkle, they began to be afraid, and they too starting moving things into the ark (Abarbanel).

8 Of the clean animals. The ones that are not disgusting to eat. There had to be seven pairs of these because eating them diminishes their numbers (Bekhor Shor). **Of the animals that are not clean.** Only a pair of each of these was necessary, since they are disgusting to eat. Admittedly there are gentiles who eat some of them, like pigs and rabbits, but there was no need to bring extras, since their litters are very large (Bekhor Shor).

9 Two of each, male and female. The puzzle is why v. 2 says there had to be seven males and seven females of each of the clean animals. When Jacob sends animals to Esau in 32:15–16, he sends as few as one male for every 10 females. That was quite enough to propagate the species. But this is how Noah knew that the Holy One wished him to offer sacrifice (Bekhor Shor). There were enough to make five offerings—one for him, one for his wife, and one for each of his three sons—and to have two males left over to propagate the species (Hizkuni).

NJPS on the seventh day the waters of the Flood came upon the earth.

11In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month, on that day

All the fountains of the great deep burst apart,

And the floodgates of the sky broke open.

(12The rain fell on the earth forty days and forty nights.) 13That same day Noah and Noah's sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth, went into the ark, with Noah's wife and

לְשִׁבְעַ֖ת הַיָּמִ֑ים וּמֵ֣י הַמַּבּ֔וּל הָי֥וּ עַל־
הָאָֽרֶץ׃
11 בִּשְׁנַ֨ת שֵׁשׁ־מֵא֜וֹת שָׁנָ֗ה לְחַיֵּי־נֹ֙חַ֙ בַּחֹ֣דֶשׁ
הַשֵּׁנִ֔י בְּשִׁבְעָֽה־עָשָׂ֥ר יֹ֛ום לַחֹ֖דֶשׁ בַּיֹּ֣ום
הַזֶּ֑ה
נִבְקְעוּ֙ כָּל־מַעְיְנֹ֣ת תְּהֹ֔ום רַבָּ֖ה
וַאֲרֻבֹּ֣ת הַשָּׁמַ֔יִם נִפְתָּֽחוּ׃
12 וַיְהִ֥י הַגֶּ֖שֶׁם עַל־הָאָ֑רֶץ אַרְבָּעִ֥ים יֹ֖ום
וְאַרְבָּעִ֣ים לָֽיְלָה׃ 13 בְּעֶ֣צֶם הַיֹּ֣ום הַזֶּ֔ה בָּ֣א
נֹ֔חַ וְשֵׁם־וְחָ֥ם וְיֶ֖פֶת בְּנֵי־נֹ֑חַ וְאֵ֥שֶׁת נֹ֛חַ

OJPS it came to pass after the seven days, that the waters of the flood were upon the earth.

11In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month, on the same day

were all the fountains of the great deep broken up,

and the windows of heaven were opened.

12And the rain was upon the earth forty days and forty nights. 13In the selfsame day entered Noah, and Shem, and Ham, and Japheth, the sons of Noah, and Noah's wife, and the three wives of his sons with

RASHI **11 In the second month.** R. Eliezer says: It was Ḥeshvan. R. Joshua says it was Iyar. **[D] All the fountains of the great deep burst apart.** Releasing the pent-up water. They were punished by means of "the *great* deep," precisely corresponding to "how *great* was man's wickedness on earth" (6:5).

12 The rain fell on the earth forty days. V. 17 says more explicitly, "The Flood continued forty days on the earth." But when it first started it was just rain. The Holy One had compassion on them, hoping they would repent, in which case these would be rains of blessing; only if they did not repent would the rain become a Flood. **And forty nights.** The first day was not counted as one of the 40 because it was not a full day; there was no rain on its (preceding) night. (As v. 11 tells us, the fountains burst apart "on that *day*.") So the 40 days ended on the 28th of Kislev, according to R. Eliezer. Assuming that months of 29 and 30 days alternated, as would be expected, there would have been 12 days of the Flood in Ḥeshvan and 28 days in Kislev.

13 That same day. Rather, "at the precise center of the day, at high noon," implying, "in broad daylight." This teaches you that the others of that generation had been saying,

[D] Heshvan is the second month counting from Tishrei, when the year is understood to begin; Iyar is the second month counting from Nisan, "the beginning of the months" (Exod. 12:2).

IBN EZRA **11 In the second month.** Iyar. **On the seventeenth day of the month.** It was on this day that Noah and his family actually entered the ark, and on this day that he brought all the animals and birds in. **All the fountains of the great deep burst apart, and the floodgates of the sky broke open.** The streams on the earth itself are not mentioned, since they come from the fountains. When the fountains of the deep burst apart, the water came up from below, and it came down from above when the windows in the storehouses of heaven opened up. The earth was thrown into chaos. There was no longer any separation between day and night; the proof of this is the promise in 8:22, "Day and night shall not cease." When the water ceased to fall from the sky, Noah knew that the 40 days and 40 nights were over (for the Holy One had revealed that secret to him). For "floodgates," compare "Even if the LORD were to make *windows* in the sky, could this come to pass?" (2 Kings 7:2). Obviously "storehouses" and "windows" are used metaphorically. As to the Hebrew word for "floodgates," some say the initial א is the first root letter, and others that it is a prefix (which would mean the root would have to be geminate).

KIMHI **11 In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month.** V. 6 has already told us how old Noah was; now we are given the precise date. Precisely which month was the "second" month is disputed by the Sages. **[B]** See B. RH 11b–12a. Apparently the ancients took Tishrei as the first month, since that was when the world was created, but at the time of the exodus Moses and Aaron were told that Nisan "shall mark for you the beginning of the months" (Exod. 12:1). Implicitly, Nisan was *not* "the beginning of the months" for the other nations. **All the fountains of the great deep burst apart.** They began to do so, as a result of the heavy rains that had fallen and loosened the soil. The earth grew more soaked every day and more water came forth from below as the fountains "broke up" (see OJPS). By the time the rain stopped falling, all the fountains of the deep had burst, and the force of the water below was strong enough to keep it streaming forth for "one hundred and fifty days" (v. 24). **And the floodgates of the sky broke open.** Not "and" but "since, after." After the floodgates of the sky broke open, the fountains of the deep burst apart (see the previous comment). The conjunction is used this way in such verses as "he was fast asleep *from* exhaustion" (Judg. 4:21); see also the Hebrew of Isa. 64:4 and Job 14:10. I have explained this phenomenon in the grammar section of my *Sefer Mikhlol*. As for "the floodgates of the sky," that is simply a poetic way to say that an enormous amount of rain fell. Compare what the king's aide said when Elisha promised during the drought that grain would be plentiful the very next day: "Even if the LORD were to make windows in the sky, could this come to pass?" (2 Kings 7:2).

12 The rain fell on the earth forty days and forty nights. As God had said it would.

13 That same day Noah . . . went into the ark. That "same" day was the 17th of Ḥeshvan (v. 11). But the previous paragraph implies that they entered the ark seven days before the Flood began. Apparently they all, humans and animals, entered the ark seven days before the Flood began for the sake of preparation, but spent that week coming and going so the animals could pasture on dry land and

[B] See Rashi's comment.

NAHMANIDES **13 That same day.** Rashi, in his second comment to v. 7, says that Noah was "of little faith," and Genesis Rabbah actually says that he lacked faith, and entered the ark only when the water came up to his ankles. If so, let the text say that the waters increased and covered the entire surface of the earth and he saw that he would drown. But see my second comment to v. 9. This paragraph is reiterating how and when Noah, his family, and all living things went into the ark—precisely when the Holy One had commanded them to do so.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **11 The floodgates of the sky broke open.** The light rain now became a massive Flood (Abarbanel).

NJPS the three wives of his sons—[14]they and all beasts of every kind, all cattle of every kind, all creatures of every kind that creep on the earth, and all birds of every kind, every bird, every winged thing. [15]They came to Noah into the ark, two each of all flesh in which there was breath of life. [16]Thus they that entered comprised male and female of all flesh, as God had commanded him. And the LORD shut him in.

[17]The Flood continued forty days on the earth, and the waters increased and raised the ark so that it rose above the earth. [18]The waters swelled and increased greatly upon the earth, and the ark drifted upon

OJPS them, into the ark; [14]they, and every beast after its kind, and all the cattle after their kind, and every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth after its kind, and every fowl after its kind, every bird of every sort. [15]And they went in unto Noah into the ark, two and two of all flesh wherein is the breath of life. [16]And they that went in, went in male and female of all flesh, as God commanded him; and the LORD shut him in.

[17]And the flood was forty days upon the earth; and the waters increased, and bore up the ark, and it was lifted up above the earth. [18]And the waters prevailed, and increased greatly upon the earth; and the ark went upon the face of the

וּשְׁלֹשֶׁת נְשֵׁי־בָנָיו אִתָּם אֶל־הַתֵּבָה׃ 14 הֵמָּה וְכָל־הַחַיָּה לְמִינָהּ וְכָל־הַבְּהֵמָה
לְמִינָהּ וְכָל־הָרֶמֶשׂ הָרֹמֵשׂ עַל־הָאָרֶץ
לְמִינֵהוּ וְכָל־הָעוֹף לְמִינֵהוּ כֹּל צִפּוֹר
כָּל־כָּנָף׃ 15 וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶל־נֹחַ אֶל־הַתֵּבָה
שְׁנַיִם שְׁנַיִם מִכָּל־הַבָּשָׂר אֲשֶׁר־בּוֹ רוּחַ
חַיִּים׃ 16 וְהַבָּאִים זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה מִכָּל־בָּשָׂר
בָּאוּ כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה אֹתוֹ אֱלֹהִים וַיִּסְגֹּר יְהוָה
בַּעֲדוֹ׃ שלישי
17 וַיְהִי הַמַּבּוּל אַרְבָּעִים יוֹם עַל־הָאָרֶץ
וַיִּרְבּוּ הַמַּיִם וַיִּשְׂאוּ אֶת־הַתֵּבָה וַתָּרָם
מֵעַל הָאָרֶץ׃ 18 וַיִּגְבְּרוּ הַמַּיִם וַיִּרְבּוּ מְאֹד
עַל־הָאָרֶץ וַתֵּלֶךְ הַתֵּבָה עַל־פְּנֵי הַמָּיִם׃

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why must v. 17 repeat what v. 12 has already told us, that the Flood was on the earth for forty days? ✦ Wouldn't it have been enough to tell us that "the waters increased" (v. 17) without repeating it in vv. 18 *and* 19?

RASHI "If we see him going into the ark, we'll smash it and kill him." Said the Holy One, "I'll put him in the ark right in front of their eyes. Then we'll see whose word will be fulfilled."

14 Every winged thing. Literally, "every bird of every wing" (compare OJPS), including grasshoppers.

16 And the LORD shut him in. Protecting him, so that the others would not smash it. He surrounded the ark with bears and lions, who would kill anyone threatening them. But the straightforward sense is what it literally says—that He shut the ark "against" Noah, protecting him from the water. That is the sense of this preposition wherever it occurs. See (e.g.) 20:18, 1 Sam. 12:19, 2 Kings 4:4, Ps. 3:4, and Job 2:4.

17 So that it rose above the earth. Like any heavily loaded boat, some of it was below the waterline—as the verses to come demonstrate. The draft of the ark was 11 cubits.

18 The waters swelled and increased greatly. On their own. By this time the rain had stopped.

IBN EZRA **14 All birds of every kind, every bird, every winged thing.** The two "birds" here are two different Hebrew words (compare OJPS). The second of them refers to anything with wings.

15 They came to Noah into the ark, two each. They came, quite miraculously, two by two of their own accord.

16 They that entered. Into the ark. The verb is the same used in v. 15 (compare OJPS). But it means something different in each verse, as NJPS correctly observes. **And the LORD shut him in.** In another case, shutting someone in might reflect negatively on the person: "Whomever He *imprisons* cannot be set free" (Job 12:14). In this situation, of course, shutting him in was much more positive than letting him out would have been! Noah closed the entrance of the ark, and the Lord assisted him by sealing up the ark so that there would be no opening anywhere in it. Had there been, they would all have immediately died.

17 The Flood continued forty days on the earth. Since we have already been told in v. 12 that the rain fell for 40 days and nights, what is this verse telling us? Here is what it means: *When* the Flood had continued on the earth for 40 days, the waters had so increased that they raised the ark off the earth. This indicates that for the first 40 days, the ark did not move at all.

KIMHI they could all breathe fresh air. It would be bad enough to be cooped up on the ark for as long as the Flood lasted. But on the 17th of Ḥeshvan, before the rain began, they all got back on board. Once Noah had closed the entrance to the ark and the window on top, the Flood began.

14 All birds of every kind, every bird, every winged thing. Rather, "all flying things of every kind: every bird [and] every winged insect."

15 Two each. Two pairs of each; see my comment to v. 9. These were exactly the same animals mentioned in that verse. None had wandered off in the interim, and no others had mingled with them.

18 The waters swelled and increased greatly. Not merely that the waters "grew more powerful" (as the first verb might be interpreted) but that the amount of them increased as well. In v. 17 they grew strong enough to float the ark; now they moved it hither and yon.

NAHMANIDES **15 They came to Noah into the ark.** They did not come to Noah at all until the very day the rain started. That is when he went into the ark, for God had spoken. "It was His spirit that assembled them" (Isa. 34:16), all at once.

16 Thus they that entered comprised male and female of all flesh. Noah put them on board in pairs. **As God had commanded him.** See Ibn Ezra's comment to v. 7. He assumes that Noah lived near the ark, and that the animals all came to him on the 10th, but that they did not go into the ark until the 17th, seven days later, when the waters of the Flood came. But this is wrong. I suppose it is possible that vv. 6–10 are not narrative, but are explaining what was meant by "Noah did just as the LORD commanded him" (v. 5), and that the narrative telling us what actually happened resumes in v. 11.

18 The waters swelled. More literally, they "increased mightily" (compare "prevailed" of OJPS). For similar usages of this verb, see "their transgressions *are excessive*" (Job 36:9) and the 80 years that "exceed" the standard lifespan of 70 in Ps. 90:10. But it could be that "might" here implies great physical force, and that the waters of the Flood uprooted trees and destroyed buildings. In rabbinic Hebrew the

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **16 The LORD shut him in.** Noah had left the ark open, fearing that not all the animals had made it in yet (Bekhor Shor). The door was blown shut by the wind (Hizkuni). The Lord protected him so that the wild animals he had put in the ark could not harm him (Gersonides). He "shut him in" by such heavy rain that it was impossible to leave the ark any more (Abarbanel).

17 The Flood continued forty days on the earth. Not just the rain of v. 12, but the upper and lower waters (Abarbanel).

NJPS the waters. [19]When the waters had swelled much more upon the earth, all the highest mountains everywhere under the sky were covered. [20]Fifteen cubits higher did the waters swell, as the mountains were covered. [21]And all flesh that stirred on earth perished—birds, cattle, beasts, and all the things that swarmed upon the earth, and all mankind. [22]All in whose nostrils was the merest breath of life, all that was on dry land, died. [23]All existence on earth was blotted out—man, cattle, creeping things, and birds of

19 וְהַמַּ֗יִם גָּבְר֛וּ מְאֹ֖ד מְאֹ֑ד עַל־הָאָ֔רֶץ
וַיְכֻסּ֗וּ כָּל־הֶהָרִים֙ הַגְּבֹהִ֔ים אֲשֶׁר־תַּ֖חַת
כָּל־הַשָּׁמָ֑יִם׃ 20 חֲמֵ֣שׁ עֶשְׂרֵ֗ה אַמָּה֙
מִלְמַ֣עְלָ֔ה גָּבְר֖וּ הַמָּ֑יִם וַיְכֻסּ֖וּ הֶהָרִֽים׃
21 וַיִּגְוַ֞ע כָּל־בָּשָׂ֤ר ׀ הָרֹמֵשׂ֙ עַל־הָאָ֔רֶץ
בָּע֖וֹף וּבַבְּהֵמָ֣ה וּבַחַיָּ֑ה וּבְכָל־הַשֶּׁ֙רֶץ֙
הַשֹּׁרֵ֣ץ עַל־הָאָ֔רֶץ וְכֹ֖ל הָאָדָֽם׃ 22 כֹּ֚ל אֲשֶׁר֙
נִשְׁמַת־ר֣וּחַ חַיִּ֔ים בְּאַפָּ֖יו מִכֹּ֣ל אֲשֶׁ֑ר
בֶּחָרָבָ֖ה מֵתוּ׃ 23 וַיִּמַּ֣ח אֶת־כָּל־הַיְקוּם ׀
אֲשֶׁר֮ ׀ עַל־פְּנֵי֒ הָאֲדָמָ֗ה מֵאָדָ֤ם עַד־בְּהֵמָה֙

OJPS waters. [19]And the waters prevailed exceedingly upon the earth; and all the high mountains that were under the whole heaven were covered. [20]Fifteen cubits upward did the waters prevail; and the mountains were covered. [21]And all flesh perished that moved upon the earth, both fowl, and cattle, and beast, and every swarming thing that swarmeth upon the earth, and every man; [22]all in whose nostrils was the breath of the spirit of life, whatsoever was in the dry land, died. [23]And He blotted out every living substance which was upon the face of the ground, both man, and cattle, and creeping

RASHI **20 Fifteen cubits higher did the waters swell, as the mountains were covered.** That is, they rose fifteen more cubits after having risen enough to cover the mountains.

22 The merest breath of life. The translations are correct. **All that was on dry land died.** But not the fish in the seas.

23 Was blotted out. Rather, "He blotted out" (OJPS). The pointing of the verb shows clearly that it is an active Qal, not the passive Niphal found later in the verse. **[E]** Note that

[E] See Special Topics, "Biblical Hebrew."

IBN EZRA **19 Much more.** Literally, "exceedingly, exceedingly." The word occurs twice, as opposed to just once in v. 18 (where it is translated "greatly"), to indicate that now the waters had risen to their greatest possible extent.

20 The mountains were covered. Why repeat this when it has already been stated in the previous verse? In the previous verse the mountains were just covered with water; now they were covered with 15 cubits of water. We, of course, believe in the words of our God, and ignore the blather of those who talk about a high mountain in the kingdom of Greece. **[H]**

21 And all flesh that stirred on earth perished. All flesh *had* perished—instantly, at a single moment. There are many more occasions of such a pluperfect in the Bible, e.g., "I pleaded with the LORD at that time" (Deut. 3:23) and "He . . . rained manna upon them for food" (Ps. 78:23), both of which should honestly be translated as "I *had* pleaded" and "He *had* rained manna." "Perished" means "died," but I will explain more about this verb in my comment to "breathed his last" of 25:8. All flesh "that stirred" obviously refers to birds, animals of all kinds, and to humans.

22 All in whose nostrils was the merest breath of life. More precisely, "all in whose nostrils was the breath of the spirit of life" (OJPS), perhaps referring to human beings only. For *neshamah* is used in the Bible only with reference to humans, not to animals. Many think that the human soul is called *neshamah* because it comes from *shamayim*, "heaven." Really these words are from two different roots, but there are other such pairs of roots sharing two radicals that are connected.

23 They were blotted out. All trace of them was blotted out, for they had no

[H] They apparently suggested that Mount Olympus was *not* covered by the waters of the Flood.

KIMHI **19 When the waters had swelled much more.** A third stage of increase, in which the waters covered the highest mountains.

21 And all flesh that stirred on earth perished. The Hebrew word implies a rapid death, not one that is long and drawn out. Death by drowning occurs in this rapid fashion. **And all mankind.** "Mankind" is mentioned last, for greatest impact. Even the human beings, who might have been thought clever enough to save themselves—their cleverness was not enough to save them. Fifteen cubits of water above the highest mountains was enough to ensure that "all" mankind drowned, even the Nephilim, the giants.

22 All in whose nostrils was the merest breath of life. Rather, "the breath [for humans] or wind [for the animals] of life." As in "the choicest and best of Lebanon" (Ezek. 31:16) or "the rivers of honey, the brooks of cream" (Job 20:17; see the Hebrew), the two words are each separately in construct with the following noun. Despite how the English sounds, the Hebrew word translated "breath" is used only of humans. "All," of course, refers only to the creatures on dry land. The fish, who live in the sea and had no involvement with humanity, did not die. "Even the fish of the sea perish" (Hosea 4:3) and "I will sweep away man and beast; I will sweep away the birds of the sky and the fish of the sea" (Zeph. 1:3) are exaggerations. And even if they are not, the references there are to specific countries. It is not all the fish everywhere in the world that would perish. The purpose of the Flood was not to return the earth to a state of being "unformed and void" (1:2) nor to create a brand-new world. Noah kept some of every species alive in the ark. But there would have been no way for Noah to keep the fish alive.

23 All existence on earth was blotted out. More precisely, "He," God, blotted them out. The verb is transitive. **They were blotted out from the earth.** Every trace of them

NAHMANIDES second of the Eighteen Benedictions is referred to as "the Power of Rain" because the rain can come down with such force. And indeed Psalm 90 might mean that one can live to 80 "given the strength" (as NJPS translates v. 10 there).

19 When the waters had swelled much more upon the earth, all the highest mountains everywhere under the sky were covered. Or, following the second explanation in the previous comment, perhaps it was the excessive force of the water that covered all the mountains.

23 All existence on earth was blotted out. They had already "perished" (v. 21) and "died" (v. 22). Now they were literally "wiped out," just as the priest in Numbers 5 "shall put these curses down in writing and *rub it off* into the water" (Num. 5:23). Their bodies were "blotted out" in the sense that they actually dissolved; the Sages go so far as to say that the waters of the Flood were boiling (though if that were true the fish would have died). Perhaps, as Genesis Rabbah says, this applied only to "all that was on dry land" but not to the fish in the sea, or (as some say) that the fish too would have been destroyed except that they all fled out to the deep ocean. In any case, they were saved. Both views may be

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **19 All the highest mountains everywhere under the sky.** According to the gentile geographers, the Torah is speaking here about the mountains of Armenia (Abarbanel).

21 All flesh that stirred on earth perished. After the mountains to which they had fled were covered (Bekhor Shor).

NJPS the sky; they were blotted out from the earth. Only Noah was left, and those with him in the ark.

8 [24]And when the waters had swelled on the earth one hundred and fifty days, [1]God remembered Noah and all the beasts and all thecattle

OJPS thing, and fowl of the heaven; and they were blotted out from the earth; and Noah only was left, and they that were with him in the ark.

8 [24]And the waters prevailed upon the earth a hundred and fifty days. [1]And God remembered Noah, and every living

עַד־רֶ֫מֶשׂ וְעַד־עֹ֥וף הַשָּׁמַ֖יִם וַיִּמָּחֻ֣ו מִן־
הָאָ֑רֶץ וַיִּשָּׁאֶ֥ר אַךְ־נֹ֖חַ וַאֲשֶׁ֥ר אִתֹּ֛ו בַּתֵּבָֽה׃
24 וַיִּגְבְּר֥וּ הַמַּ֖יִם עַל־הָאָ֑רֶץ חֲמִשִּׁ֥ים וּמְאַ֖ת
ח יֽוֹם׃ 1 וַיִּזְכֹּ֣ר אֱלֹהִ֗ים אֶת־נֹ֙חַ֙ וְאֵ֣ת
כָּל־הַחַיָּ֔ה וְאֶת־כָּל־הַבְּהֵמָ֖ה אֲשֶׁ֥ר

RASHI all ל״ה verbs are apocopated in the converted imperfect. **Only Noah.** The translations convey the straightforward sense. But there is a midrash that takes *akh* (translated "only" in NJPS) as an unusual verb form here, indicating that Noah was coughing and spitting blood from the strain of taking care of all the animals. Others say he was late feeding the lion, and he mauled him; about which, see Prov. 11:31, "the righteous on earth get their deserts."

IBN EZRA offspring. **Only Noah was left, and those with him in the ark.** This completely refutes those senseless Jews who think that the Flood did not cover the entire earth. **[I]**

24 When the waters had swelled on the earth one hundred and fifty days. Because "the fountains of the great deep burst apart" (v. 11) and so forth. And of course it would rain again occasionally too. "I will make it rain . . . forty days" (v. 4) refers only to continuous rain. The fact that it would continue to rain from time to time even after the first 40 days is clear from "the rain from the sky was held back" (8:2).

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ How could the waters swell on the earth for 150 days (v. 24) if the rain stopped after 40 days?

8:1 God remembered Noah. "God" alludes to the divine aspect of justice, which can be tipped toward mercy by the prayers of the righteous. So too the wickedness of the wicked can tip the aspect of mercy toward that of justice. That is what happens in "The LORD [that is, the aspect of mercy] saw how great was man's wickedness on earth" (6:5) and "The LORD said, 'I will blot out from the earth the men whom I created'" (6:7), where the name alluding to mercy is used. **[F] And all the beasts and all the cattle.** What did

[F] Some texts of Rashi's comment read "the name alluding to justice," but that must be an error.

8:1 God remembered Noah. And his sons and the wives; but Noah was the essential figure in the group. What He "remembered" was the oath He had sworn. God forbid that we impute forgetfulness even to the least of the ministering angels, let alone to the Creator of all things. **And all the beasts.** This is a general term, including the

[I] It is not clear who the "senseless Jews" are—but Genesis Rabbah states that "the land of Israel was not submerged by the waters of the Flood."

KIMHI was blotted out. Not a building was left. But the Sages take the repetition of "blotting out" to imply that they were blotted out from this world and from the World to Come.

24 The waters had swelled on the earth one hundred and fifty days. Moses knew all this from what he was told by the Holy Spirit. It is not that Noah kept precise track and transmitted the information through the generations. Noah did know that the rain would last for 40 days, because the Holy One had told him this explicitly. Since there was no visible day or night, and Noah was in any case sealed up in the ark, how was he able to keep track? He was certainly able to tell when the rain had stopped, because they could feel it falling on the ark. But how could he count the 40 days of 8:6, or the three 7-day periods that followed? We are forced to assume that Noah had enough skill to construct instruments that could measure the hours and the days, like the professionals of our own day who keep track of the hours even when the sun and stars are not visible. Noah did keep lamps burning in the ark day and night so that he could feed the animals. Note that the first 40 days came to an end on the 29th of Kislev, and the 150 days after that concluded on the 1st of Sivan—five solar months of 30 days each.

8:1 God remembered. God's remembering implies that there is such a thing as God's forgetting, which of course there is not. But this anthropomorphic expression is fairly common; see (e.g.) Lev. 26:42 and 45. God saw that the suffering they had undergone in the ark was

NAHMANIDES true; the waters of the Flood might have been boiling, but have mixed with the water in the seas and warmed just its upper layers. The fish might have fled to the depths and survived there. Some say those fish in the seas who were close enough to the ocean might have fled there when they felt the heat. But even if all the fish in the inland seas and rivers died, most sea life is in the ocean, and the Flood did not reach there: "The rain fell on the *earth*" (v. 12)—on the land, as the Hebrew word literally means. At any rate, the fish were saved by some means or other, for Noah did not bring any fish into the ark, and the covenant of 9:9–10 does not mention them. **They were blotted out from the earth.** Some explain this repetition of "blotting out" to mean that not only were they killed, but their memory was wiped out in the sense that they had no offspring. But since everyone was wiped out, what would be the point of saying they would not have offspring? Perhaps it could refer to the birds and the creeping things, to say that any eggs they had left behind had also been destroyed. But perhaps, as NJPS seems to take it, everything after the dash is simply an expansion of the first "blotted out." The Sages, of course, take the first "earth" in this verse—literally "the ground" (OJPS)—to refer to this world and the second one, this one, to refer to the World to Come, adopting the same understanding of "earth" that I discussed in my comment to "I am about to destroy them with the earth" (6:13).

8:1 God remembered Noah. He "remembered" Noah because he was righteous and blameless, and because He had made a covenant with him to save him. His family was of course included, but they are not mentioned because they were saved only by means of Noah's merit. **And all the beasts and all the cattle.** These *are* "remembered" explicitly, though not due to their merit. For merit and

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **24 When the waters had swelled on the earth one hundred and fifty days.** Rather, while "the waters prevailed" (OJPS). As long as the water was higher than the mountaintops, there was no way of knowing whether it was increasing or decreasing (Bekhor Shor). There are a great number of chronological (and other) details in the story; the more detailed a story is, the more likely we are to believe it (Gersonides).

8:1 God remembered. The phrase also occurs only in 19:29, 30:22, and Exod. 2:24 (Masorah). **The waters subsided.** Rather, like the king's hot anger in Esther 2:1 and 7:10, it "cooled down"; this is how we know the waters of the Flood were boiling (Hizkuni).

אִתּוֹ בַּתֵּבָה וַיַּעֲבֵר אֱלֹהִים רוּחַ עַל־הָאָרֶץ
וַיָּשֹׁכּוּ הַמָּיִם: 2 וַיִּסָּכְרוּ מַעְיְנֹת תְּהוֹם
וַאֲרֻבֹּת הַשָּׁמָיִם וַיִּכָּלֵא הַגֶּשֶׁם מִן־
הַשָּׁמָיִם: 3 וַיָּשֻׁבוּ הַמַּיִם מֵעַל הָאָרֶץ
הָלוֹךְ וָשׁוֹב וַיַּחְסְרוּ הַמַּיִם מִקְצֵה חֲמִשִּׁים

NJPS that were with him in the ark, and God caused a wind to blow across the earth, and the waters subsided. 2The fountains of the deep and the floodgates of the sky were stopped up, and the rain from the sky was held back; 3the waters then receded steadily from the earth. At the end of one hundred and fifty days the waters

OJPS thing, and all the cattle that were with him in the ark; and God made a wind to pass over the earth, and the waters assuaged; 2the fountains also of the deep and the windows of heaven were stopped, and the rain from heaven was restrained. 3And the waters returned from off the earth continually; and after the end of a hundred and fifty days the waters

RASHI He "remember" about the animals? That these animals had not previously "corrupted their ways," and that they did not have sex at all on the ark. **God caused a wind to blow across the earth.** Not "across" the earth, but "about" the earth, "having to do with" the earth. A spirit (not a "wind") of comfort and repose passed before Him regarding the earth. **Subsided.** A verb that refers to the calming of anger: "When the anger of King Ahasuerus subsided" (Esther 2:1).

2 The fountains of the deep . . . were stopped up. When they "burst apart" (7:11), it said *"all* the fountains"; here it is just "the fountains." Those that the world would have need of, like the hot springs of Tiberias, were left open. **Stopped up.** Literally, "restrained," as in "None of us will *withhold* his burial place from you" (23:6); "O LORD, You will not *withhold* from me Your compassion" (Ps. 40:12).

3 At the end of one hundred and fifty days the waters diminished. That is, they began to diminish. It was the 1st of Sivan. The rain stopped on the 27th of Kislev. **[G]** Three more days in Kislev plus 29 in Tevet make 32; Shevat, Adar, Nisan, and Iyar add another 118, for a total of 150.

[G] It is not clear how to reconcile this statement with Rashi's comment to 7:12.

IBN EZRA winged creatures and those that crawl. **God caused a wind to blow.** This wind did not merely "pass over the earth" (OJPS) and vanish, but blew constantly. **The waters subsided.** Rather, they "quieted"—that is, they stopped increasing. Compare Esther 7:10, "Then was the king's wrath *assuaged*."

2 Stopped up. Both in meaning and in sound, this root סכר resembles the root סגר, "to close." But they are two separate roots; כ and ג are not among the letters that interchange (like ס and שׂ or א, ה, ו, and י). **The rain from the sky was held back.** It was retained within the storehouse of heaven.

3 The waters then receded. They began to recede back below the surface of the earth, where they belonged. **At the end of one hundred and fifty days the waters diminished.** Back to where they belonged. Since day and night were indistinguishable, Noah knew that it had taken 150 days only by prophecy.

KIMHI sufficient, and that He ought not make the waters increase any longer. From this point on the waters would decrease just as they had increased. **God caused a wind to blow across the earth.** That is, across the waters that were upon the earth. It was the force of this wind that was preventing the waters from increasing any further.

2 The fountains of the deep and the floodgates of the sky were stopped up. Rather, the fountains were "stifled"—the waters were prevented from continuing to increase. But the cracks through which the waters had risen were not stopped up. The waters now began to return below, at the same pace as they had increased, while the wind began to dry out the earth. You might think the waters would have taken longer to decrease, as the earth dried and various outlets closed, but nature was on their side. This time, they were not rising up, but sinking down. As for the "floodgates of the sky," they had been stopped up long before, at the end of the 40 days. So now both the waters from above and those from below ceased. **The rain from the sky was held back.** So that there would not be even the slightest rain.

3 The waters then receded steadily. At a deliberate pace. To the original 40 days of rain, add 150 days during which the waters from below gradually increased and another 150 during which they gradually decreased; that makes 340. Then there were the 21 days during which Noah sent forth the birds, giving 361 days. These were the 12 months that Noah spent in the ark.

NAHMANIDES demerit apply exclusively to humanity. Rather, He was "mindful of His sacred promise" (Ps. 105:42) when He spoke and the world came into being. The divine will that He had had at the moment of the world's creation rose up before Him, and He willed the continued existence of the world, complete with all the species He had originally created in it. He saw fit now to bring them out of the ark so they should not perish there. (The expression includes the birds and creeping things, as v. 17 clarifies.) **God caused a wind to blow across the earth.** A great, mighty wind came forth from the belly of the earth over the surface of the deep, sweeping up the water and stopping up "the fountains of the deep" (v. 2). Notice that the wind does not blow "across the water" but "across the earth." **And the waters subsided.** The waters that had been flowing from the deep "subsided," as the same Hebrew word is used in Esther 7:10. But the word can also imply concealment, the waters once again being swallowed up by the deep, in their original place. Seder Olam explains that the water that had come from below sank back into its original place and the water that had come from above was evaporated by the wind.

2 The rain from the sky was held back. No rain fell until they had come out of the ark. (The rain that started the Flood had already stopped after 40 days.) The wind of v. 1 made the sky like iron, so that there was no rain, not even dew. The atmosphere dried out, so the water was able to dry up.

3 The waters then receded steadily from the earth. Little by little, until the surface of the ground was dry. **At the end of one hundred and fifty days the waters diminished.** The waters had receded very, very little, until suddenly "at the end of one hundred and fifty days" they diminished—in one day—enough for the ark to come to rest. See my next comment, especially the second paragraph.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **2 The fountains of the deep and the floodgates of the sky were stopped up.** Chronologically, this happened after 7:17; our passage is summing up what caused the waters to recede (Hizkuni).

3 The waters then receded steadily from the earth. In fact they had begun to recede as soon as the rain stopped; see my comment to 8:24 (Bekhor Shor).

NJPS diminished, [4]so that in the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month, the ark came to

OJPS decreased. [4]And the ark rested in the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month, upon

וּמְאַת יוֹם׃ [4] וַתָּנַח הַתֵּבָה בַּחֹדֶשׁ
הַשְּׁבִיעִי בְּשִׁבְעָה־עָשָׂר יוֹם לַחֹדֶשׁ עַל

RASHI **4 In the seventh month.** Sivan, counting from Kislev, when the rain stopped (see further my comment to v. 5). **On the seventeenth day of the month, the ark came to rest on the mountains of Ararat.** This is how you can tell that the ark drew 11 cubits of water. The water did not diminish as far as "the tops of the mountains" (v. 5) until the first day of the 10th month, which, counting from Ḥeshvan when the rain started, was Av. Now, the water had peaked at 15 cubits above the tops of the mountains (7:20). It therefore receded that much from the 1st of Sivan to the 1st of Av—15 cubits in 60 days or one cubit every four days. In the 16 days from the 1st of Sivan to the 16th, therefore, it would have diminished only 4 cubits. The ark came to rest the next day, showing that it had a draft of 11 cubits.

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ What explains the confusion of dates in this story, which has troubled all the traditional sources? According to 7:11, the Flood began "in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month." That should be Heshvan, the month after Tishrei. The rain would have stopped on the 28th of Kislev, and the 150 days would have been up at the end of Iyar. But our sources say that the month when "the ark came to rest " (v. 4) was Sivan, which could not be "the seventh month" unless you count from Kislev, when the rain stopped. Moreover, if "the tenth month," when "the tops of the mountains became visible" (v. 5), was Av, you would have to be counting from Ḥeshvan, when the rain *started*. How can one story count the months in so many different ways?

IBN EZRA **4 In the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month.** Those who calculate from the 150 days of v. 3 that these five months must have been solar months are incorrect even according to their own logic, since five solar months have 152 days. But five lunar months, if you follow the standard calendar, have only 148 days, even if you assume that the year is full; so Ḥeshvan and Kislev both had 30 days instead of 29. But what is the point of this kind of figuring? Even if it had been written that Noah used the solar calendar and started the year in Tishrei, the festivals were not given to us by Noah. **The ark came to rest.** We could go on at length about this subject, but what would be the point? It would be a waste of time.

KIMHI **4 In the seventh month.** Sivan, the seventh month after Kislev, when the rain started to fall. **The ark came to rest on the mountains of Ararat.** Either these were the highest mountains, or the ark was in that part of the world. There may have been others elsewhere that were higher, but it is certain that there were many others lower, since the other mountains around did not come into view until "the tenth month" (v. 5).

NAHMANIDES **4 In the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month, the ark came to rest.** See the calculation given in Rashi's comment. (The same calculation is found in Genesis Rabbah.) But since Rashi picks and chooses among the midrashim, trying his best to clarify the straightforward sense of the text, he authorizes us to do the same. For the Torah has 70 faces. There are many midrashim that disagree with each other. What I say is that this calculation does not properly fit the text. Even if we could put up with counting "the seventh month" in our verse from the day when "the rain from the sky was held back" (v. 2)—which does not jibe with the system of counting the months at the beginning (7:11) and end (here in vv. 13–14) of the story—still, could "the seventh month" here in v. 4 be counting from Kislev and "the tenth month" in the very next verse be counting from Ḥeshvan? As for saying that the water diminished one cubit every four days, it is well known that when a dry wash is flooded, the water in it may start by diminishing one cubit every four days but by the end it is diminishing by four cubits in one day. According to this chronology, the tops of the mountains appeared on the 1st of Av and the waters had dried up by the 1st of Tishrei, meaning that in 60 days the waters had diminished by the full height of the tallest mountains—which is thousands of cubits. Moreover, when Noah sent forth the dove on the 17th of Elul, the water was still covering not merely the earth but the tops of the trees—yet it was all dry 12 days later. Logically, if the ark drew 11 cubits of water (more than a third of its height) it would have sunk. Remember that it was much wider at the base, narrowing to a single cubit at the top, the opposite of a normal boat. And it was extremely heavily laden. It would seem according to a straightforward reading that the 150 days "when the waters had swelled on the earth" (7:24) must include the 40 days of rain, which were the primary cause of the waters increasing. So the waters would have begun to subside at the end of the 150 days, that is, on the 17th of Nisan. The ark came to rest 30 days later, on the 17th of Iyar, "the seventh month" since the rain had begun to fall. It was 73 days after that, on the 1st of Av, "the tenth month" since the rain had begun to fall, that "the tops of the mountains became visible" (v. 5). This is at least a slight rectification of the language of the text. **[E]**

But I believe the 150 days of 7:24 lasted from the 17th of Ḥeshvan (the second month counting from Tishrei) to the 17th of Nisan (the seventh month counting from Tishrei), and *that* was the day the ark came to rest. The Holy One caused a strong east wind to blow all that night, and "turned the water into dry ground" (Exod. 14:21), making it diminish so much that the ark came to rest. Notice that v. 1 says that "the waters subsided," but not that they began to subside "on the nth day of the nth month." The length of time that the waters "went on diminishing" until "the tops of the mountains became visible" (v. 5) is given a duration, but the first diminishing is not. For "at the end of one hundred and fifty days the waters diminished" (v. 3), and on that day "the ark came to rest." The chronology, therefore, is this: "the fountains of the great deep burst apart, and the floodgates of the sky broke open" (7:11) on the very day the rain began to fall. The rain fell for 40 days, during which the waters swelled 15 cubits above the tops of the mountains. At the end of 40 days the rain stopped, but the fountains of the great deep and the floodgates of the sky were still open. The atmosphere was extremely humid and the whole earth was swamped with water, which could not drain nor would ever dry out on its own; this lasted for a full 150 days, counting from the start of the rain. At that point, "God caused a wind to blow across the earth" (v. 1), and the openings of "the fountains of the deep . . . were stopped up" (v. 2). The water that had been flowing from them returned to its place, so that the deep was once again filled with water as it had been at first; and "the floodgates of the sky" were stopped up as well. The atmosphere was dried up by the wind, which also lapped up the water, much of it on that very day—enough so that the ark (which only drew two or three cubits of water) came to rest. After a further 73 days, "in the tenth month, on the first of the month"—Tammuz—"the tops of the mountains became visible" (v. 5). After another 40 days, on the 10th of Av, "Noah opened the window of the ark" (v. 6). Three weeks after that, he sent forth the dove for the last time, and 30 days after that, "Noah removed the covering of the ark" (v. 13).

[E] There are still two different systems for counting months. Nahmanides will now explain the chronology in a way that permits all the months to be counted from Tishrei.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **4 Ararat.** The place is also mentioned only in 2 Kings 19:37 (repeated in Isa. 37:38) and Jer. 51:27 (Masorah).

NJPS rest on the mountains of Ararat. 5The waters went on diminishing until the tenth month; in the tenth month, on the first of the month, the tops of the mountains became visible.

6At the end of forty days, Noah opened the window of the ark that he had made 7and sent out the raven; it went to and fro

OJPS the mountains of Ararat. 5And the waters decreased continually until the tenth month; in the tenth month, on the first day of the month, were the tops of the mountains seen.

6And it came to pass at the end of forty days, that Noah opened the window of the ark which he had made. 7And he sent forth a raven, and it went forth to and fro, until

הָרֵ֥י אֲרָרָֽט׃ 5 וְהַמַּ֗יִם הָי֤וֹ הָלוֹךְ֙ וְחָסֹ֔ר
עַ֖ד הַחֹ֣דֶשׁ הָעֲשִׂירִ֑י בָּעֲשִׂירִ֗י בְּאֶחָד֙
לַחֹ֔דֶשׁ נִרְא֥וּ רָאשֵׁ֖י הֶהָרִֽים׃
6 וַיְהִ֣י מִקֵּ֔ץ אַרְבָּעִ֥ים י֖וֹם וַיִּפְתַּ֣ח נֹ֑חַ
אֶת־חַלּ֥וֹן הַתֵּבָ֖ה אֲשֶׁר־עָשָֽׂה׃ 7 וַיְשַׁלַּ֖ח

RASHI **5 In the tenth month.** Av, counting from Ḥeshvan, when the rain started. It cannot be Elul, counting (as in v. 4) from Kislev, when the rain stopped. That is impossible. The numbers just do not work out. The "seventh month" of v. 4 must be counting from Kislev; otherwise it would not be Sivan, which v. 3 tells us it is. But here "the tenth month" must be counting from Ḥeshvan and not Elul; otherwise, the ground could not have begun to dry "in the first month, on the first of the month" (v. 13), since "the first month" can only refer to Tishrei, the anniversary of the creation of the world. Add it up: Noah sent out the raven at the end of 40 days (vv. 6–7) and then there were 21 days before the dove was sent out for the third time. If "the tenth month" had been Elul, "the first month" of v. 13 would have to be Ḥeshvan, but there is simply no sensible way to consider Ḥeshvan as the 1st month. It has to be Tishrei (or, according to the system of R. Joshua, Nisan). **[H]**

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why did Noah wait "forty days" (v. 6) to send out the raven after the ark had come to rest and the tops of the mountains were visible? ✦ Why does v. 7 not tell us *why* Noah "sent out the raven," as v. 8 tells us why he sent out the dove?

6 At the end of forty days. After "the tops of the mountains became visible" (v. 5). **The window of the ark that he had made.** The window he had made for the "opening" of 6:16. This was not the same as the door of the ark, made for going in and out.

7 To and fro. That is, it simply kept flying around the ark rather than going to do what Noah had sent it for; it suspected Noah of

[H] See Rashi's first comment to 7:11.

RASHBAM **8:6 At the end of forty days.** After the waters had stopped increasing. That occurred on the 1st of Sivan, so this was the 10th of Tammuz.

IBN EZRA **5 In the tenth month, on the first of the month, the tops of the mountains became visible.** Notice that Noah was able to fix the first of the month without being able to see the new moon, for he had not yet "opened the window of the ark" (v. 6).

6 Noah opened the window. He may have made windows on every side; now he opened one of them—the "opening" of 6:16.

7 And sent out the raven. On the 10th of Shevat. **It went to and fro until the waters had dried up from the earth.** It

KIMHI **5 The waters went on diminishing until the tenth month.** That is, they went on diminishing until, in the tenth month, the tops of the mountains became visible. They of course continued to diminish after that. The "tenth month" here is Av, the tenth month after the rains began to fall, in Ḥeshvan.

6 At the end of forty days. Evidently, after the waters began to decrease. But I think it means after the ark came to rest. How could Noah be aware that the waters had started to decrease? But when the ark came to rest, he could feel it grounding on something hard. **Noah opened the window of the ark.** The "opening" of 6:16. But if Noah knew when the rain had stopped (as I said in my comment to 7:24), why did he not open this window immediately? He must have still feared that huge waves would pour water into the ark through this opening. But by 40 days after the ark came to rest he was confident this would not happen.

7 And sent out the raven. He figured that if the waters had gone down sufficiently the raven, a carnivore, would find human and

NAHMANIDES **5 The waters went on diminishing until** in **the tenth month** (Tammuz), **the tops of the mountains became visible.** It therefore took 73 days for the water to drop 15 cubits from its greatest height. Again: we do not know how much the water had to drop before the ark could come to rest or how much water the ark drew; the text simply did not have to tell us these things. In my opinion, what kept the ark afloat was the water streaming from the deeps, the more so if they were boiling, as our tradition says. Otherwise, the ark was so heavily overloaded with animals, food, and drink that it would have sunk. Once the wind began to diminish the water, it simultaneously ceased to flow (and to boil), at which point the weight of the ark caused it to sink, and it hit bottom on the mountain. The other commentators assume that we know all these things prophetically—because the text relates them—but that Noah knew nothing until he felt the ark hit bottom, after which he waited what he thought was long enough for the water to subside. However, we, they, and the Sages all agree that the mountains of Ararat were among "all the high mountains that were under the whole heaven" (7:19; see OJPS), and that the water reached a height of 15 cubits above them. But this poses a problem. Mount Olympus is much higher, while Ararat is in one of the lowest places on earth, near Babylonia. So perhaps our verse is telling us that the waters had receded much more than 15 cubits by this point, and that it was the highest mountains whose tops "became visible" now. It was just that the ark happened to be in Ararat when the waters receded enough for it to come to ground on those particular mountains.

6 At the end of forty days, Noah opened the window of the ark. Once the rain stopped, Noah opened and closed the window as he liked. But 73 days after the ark hit bottom, when Noah looked out the window he observed the tops of the mountains of Ararat and then closed it again. Forty days after that, he opened the window "and sent out the raven" (v. 7).

7 And sent out the raven. Notice that this event is not provided with a calendar date. Noah waited 40 days after seeing the tops of

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **5 The waters went on diminishing until the tenth month; in the tenth month, on the first of the month, the tops of the mountains became visible.** Counting from the end of the 40 days, this makes 182 days for the water to diminish by 15 cubits, at a rate of one cubit every 12 days. In the 72 days after the ark came to rest, the water would have gone down six cubits, demonstrating precisely the depth of water that the ark drew. But on the ark they figured out the 15-cubit depth, which they had no way of telling directly, from the rate they observed during these 72 days (Bekhor Shor).

6 At the end of forty days. Noah saw that the Holy One had taken 40 days to destroy the world with the Flood, so he thought it made sense to wait that same number of days (Abarbanel).

7 And sent out the raven. Notice that he did not send out the raven "to see whether the waters had decreased" (v. 8), but to see

NJPS until the waters had dried up from the earth. 8Then he sent out the dove to see whether the waters had decreased from the surface of the ground. 9But the dove could not find a resting place for its foot, and returned to him to the ark, for there was water over all the earth. So putting out his hand, he took it into the ark with him. 10He waited another seven days, and again sent out the dove from the ark. 11The dove came back to him toward evening, and there in its bill was a

OJPS the waters were dried up from off the earth. 8And he sent forth a dove from him, to see if the waters were abated from off the face of the ground. 9But the dove found no rest for the sole of her foot, and she returned unto him to the ark, for the waters were on the face of the whole earth; and he put forth his hand, and took her, and brought her in unto him into the ark. 10And he stayed yet other seven days; and again he sent forth the dove out of the ark. 11And the dove came in to him at eventide; and lo in her

הַמַּ֖יִם מֵעַ֣ל הָאָֽרֶץ׃ 8 וַיְשַׁלַּ֖ח אֶת־הַיּוֹנָ֑ה
מֵאִתּ֗וֹ לִרְאוֹת֙ הֲקַ֣לּוּ הַמַּ֔יִם מֵעַ֖ל פְּנֵ֥י
הָאֲדָמָֽה׃ 9 וְלֹא־מָצְאָ֤ה הַיּוֹנָה֙ מָנ֣וֹחַ לְכַף־
רַגְלָ֔הּ וַתָּ֖שָׁב אֵלָ֑יו אֶל־הַתֵּבָ֔ה כִּי־מַ֥יִם
עַל־פְּנֵ֖י כָּל־הָאָ֑רֶץ וַיִּשְׁלַ֤ח יָדוֹ֙ וַיִּקָּחֶ֔הָ
וַיָּבֵ֥א אֹתָ֛הּ אֵלָ֖יו אֶל־הַתֵּבָֽה׃ 10 וַיָּ֣חֶל ע֔וֹד
שִׁבְעַ֥ת יָמִ֖ים אֲחֵרִ֑ים וַיֹּ֣סֶף שַׁלַּ֗ח אֶת־
הַיּוֹנָ֛ה מִן־הַתֵּבָֽה׃ 11 וַתָּבֹ֤א אֵלָיו֙ הַיּוֹנָ֔ה
לְעֵ֖ת עֶ֑רֶב וְהִנֵּ֥ה עֲלֵה־זַ֛יִת טָרָ֖ף בְּפִ֥יהָ

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why does v. 9 give us so much more detail about the dove than v. 7 does about the raven? ✦ Why does Noah twice wait "another seven days" (vv. 10 and 12) to send out the dove? (We presume he did the same the first time, in v. 8.) Both with these and with the 40 days of the raven, I would love to know whether he chose them randomly or had some knowledge or some plan.

RASHI wanting its mate (see B. Sanh. 108b). **Until the waters had dried up.** This phrase is straightforward. But a midrash takes it as follows: The raven was kept at the ready for another mission that it would have to perform when "the waters had dried up"—during the drought in Elijah's time due to lack of rain. For when Elijah hid from King Ahab, "The ravens brought him bread and meat every morning and every evening" (1 Kings 17:6).

8 He sent out the dove. From the fact that "he waited *another* seven days" (v. 10) before sending it out again, we derive that he waited seven days before sending it out the first time. Note that the verb is Piel, not Qal; **[I]** he did not "send" the dove to a specific place but "released" it to go where it pleased. That is how he would know whether the water had decreased: if it found a resting place, it would not come back to him.

10 He waited another seven days. For the verb, see "Men would listen to me *expectantly*" (Job 29:21, where "expectantly" is also a verb in Hebrew).

11 There in its bill was a plucked-off olive leaf! Rather, and overliterally, "an olive leaf he had plucked off was in her bill." The Hebrew *word* for "dove" is grammatically

[I] See Special Topics, "Biblical Hebrew."

IBN EZRA kept flying around until the day Noah himself left the ark.

8 Then he sent out the dove. A week after sending out the raven—on the 17th of Shevat, the "tenth month" (v. 5) after the Flood had begun. We learn that he waited a week before sending out the dove from v. 10, which tells us, "He waited *another* seven days." Clearly Noah shared the perspective that the quarters of the moon are significant natural periods.

10 He waited. This verb cannot come from the root יחל; **[J]** the pointing is wrong. It must come from חלל, or else it is morphologically very strange. **And again sent out the dove from the ark.** On the 24th of Shevat.

11 There in its bill was a plucked-off olive leaf. Some say the Hebrew word translated "plucked-off" here is simply a synonym for "olive leaf": "There was an olive leaf, a 'pluck,' in its bill." Dan. 12:2 has

[J] As modern scholars think it does.

KIMHI animal corpses strewn about the earth and bring back a chunk of the flesh in its beak. But it brought back nothing.

8 Then he sent out the dove. When he saw that he had gotten no information from the raven, he sent out a dove, which would at least have the imagination to bring back a response of some kind after being sent out once or twice; and doves of course have a natural homing instinct. (Kings raise them in their palaces and send them far off with messages tied to their wings; they come back with a return message from the recipient.) So Noah was confident it would bring something back to him.

9 The dove could not find a resting place for its foot, and returned to him to the ark. "To him" so that he would understand that it had not found anything; "to the ark" so that it could come to rest on the outside of the ark. Having failed to bring anything back, it did not want to reenter the ark as the raven had. **So putting out his hand, he took it into the ark with him.** When Noah saw that it was reluctant to reenter the ark, he put his hand out through the opening and brought it back inside.

11 The dove came back to him toward evening. Of the same day on which it had been sent out. **There in its bill was a plucked-off olive leaf!** Noah could see that the dove had plucked it off itself and not just found it floating on the water. And why an olive leaf? Either

NAHMANIDES the mountains, thinking that by that time the tops of the towers would be visible, the trees would have emerged, and the birds would find places to alight and build their nests.

9 But the dove could not find a resting place for its foot. Birds do not come to rest on the tops of bare, treeless mountains; and the rest of the earth was still covered with water. The dove could not find a desirable resting place for its foot. But as soon as it saw the trees, it went off on its own to nest in the branches.

11 And there in its bill was a plucked-off olive leaf. Apparently the trees were not uprooted and destroyed by the Flood. There was not a rush of waters; the whole world simply filled up with water. But in Genesis Rabbah R. Levi says that it came from the Mount of Olives, for the land of Israel was not submerged by the waters of the Flood. As the Holy One told Ezekiel to proclaim: "You are an uncleansed land, not to be washed with rain on the day of indignation" (Ezek. 22:24); R. Bebai says that the gates of Paradise opened for

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS whether there were any buildings left; that is where crows nest (Abarbanel). **It went to and fro.** It was afraid to fly too far lest it get fatigued and fall into the water. But it flew out to feed on the floating cadavers (Bekhor Shor). Noah did not bother to try to get it back into the ark; it never came close enough, but just kept circling around (Abarbanel).

9 The dove could not find a resting place for its foot. Clearly the mountains of Ararat were higher than any others. For the dove, unlike the raven, was not afraid to fly far away, since (as a midrash tells us) it flies with only one wing at a time; when one gets tired, it switches to the other (Bekhor Shor). **So putting out his hand.** To check whether there was any dirt or mud on its legs or wings (Bekhor Shor).

10 He waited another seven days. As we see in Leviticus 13, it takes seven days for gradual changes to be noticeable (Bekhor Shor).

NJPS plucked-off olive leaf! Then Noah knew that the waters had decreased on the earth. 12He waited still another seven days and sent the dove forth; and it did not return to him any more.

13In the six hundred and first year, in the first month, on the first of the month, the waters began to dry from the earth; and when Noah removed the covering of the ark, he saw that the surface of the ground was drying. 14And in the second month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, the earth was dry.

וַיֵּדַע נֹחַ כִּי־קַלּוּ הַמַּיִם מֵעַל הָאָרֶץ׃
12 וַיִּיָּחֶל עוֹד שִׁבְעַת יָמִים אֲחֵרִים וַיְשַׁלַּח
אֶת־הַיּוֹנָה וְלֹא־יָסְפָה שׁוּב־אֵלָיו עוֹד׃
13 וַיְהִי בְּאַחַת וְשֵׁשׁ־מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה בָּרִאשׁוֹן
בְּאֶחָד לַחֹדֶשׁ חָרְבוּ הַמַּיִם מֵעַל הָאָרֶץ
וַיָּסַר נֹחַ אֶת־מִכְסֵה הַתֵּבָה וַיַּרְא וְהִנֵּה
חָרְבוּ פְּנֵי הָאֲדָמָה׃ 14 וּבַחֹדֶשׁ הַשֵּׁנִי
בְּשִׁבְעָה וְעֶשְׂרִים יוֹם לַחֹדֶשׁ יָבְשָׁה
הָאָרֶץ׃ ס

OJPS mouth an olive-leaf freshly plucked; so Noah knew that the waters were abated from off the earth. 12And he stayed yet other seven days; and sent forth the dove; and she returned not again unto him any more.

13And it came to pass in the six hundred and first year, in the first month, the first day of the month, the waters were dried up from off the earth; and Noah removed the covering of the ark, and looked, and behold, the face of the ground was dried. 14And in the second month, on the seven and twentieth day of the month, was the earth dry.

RASHI feminine in the Bible (explaining "*her* bill") even when the form of the word appears masculine, as in Ezek. 7:16 or Song 5:12. But an individual bird could of course be either male or female. This was the male dove. The straightforward sense is that this dove had plucked off a leaf, but a midrash reads the Hebrew to say, "an olive leaf *for food*," and "her mouth" (as OJPS more literally translates "its bill") as indicating a communication. The dove was telling Noah, "I would rather have food as bitter as an olive, but from the Holy One, than food as sweet as honey from the hands of flesh and blood."

12 He waited. This verb uses the same root as in v. 10 but in Niphal rather than in Qal. **[J]** The implication is that he "kept waiting."

13 In the first month. Tishrei, following the system of R. Eliezer; Nisan, following that of R. Joshua. **The waters began to dry.** NJPS clarifies the more literal translation of OJPS. The earth turned into mud, but its upper surface formed a more solid crust.

14 In the second month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month. It had begun "in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month" (7:11). The difference is the

[J] Rashi cites the Hitpael form of the verb, but Niphal and Hitpael often carry the same sense in Biblical Hebrew, and it is likely he simply said this as shorthand; without vowels, the Qal and Niphal forms are indistinguishable.

IBN EZRA a similar expression: "The earth, the dust." The word certainly seems to be used this way in Ezek. 17:9. The problem is the *qamatz* under the ר, which makes the word look like a noun. But it could be the pausal form of a verb, as in "He wounded" (Hosea 6:1) or "A lion has roared" (Amos 3:8) and the like—which is what I think; the ב, which the translations take as "in" its bill, is to be ignored, as in "He is one" of Job 23:13, where it also appears in the Hebrew: "its bill had plucked an olive leaf." Or our word could simply be an adjective that has the same meaning as the passive participle: "plucked-off." Adjectives of this kind do exist, some of them matching active participles and some matching passive ones.

12 He waited. This time the verb is clearly יחל, in the Niphal. **Still another seven days.** Until the 1st of Adar. **And it did not return to him any more.** As it had previously done. It never returned to him. For this use of "any more" to mean "ever," compare "so long" of v. 22.

13 The waters began to dry. But no foot could yet stand on the earth; it was too soft. Only **the surface of the ground was drying.** It was almost two months later before "the earth was dry" (v. 14) completely.

14 In the second month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month. The Flood started "the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month" (7:11); those who think the months here are lunar months rely on this date for their argument. The

KIMHI because that was the first tree it found, or because an olive is in leaf all year long. But a midrash has the dove preferring bitter food provided by God to sweet food provided by flesh and blood.

13 In the six hundred and first year, in the first month, on the first of the month. Noah turned 600 on the 30th of Elul; on the 1st of Tishrei, his 601st year began.

14 And in the second month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, the earth was dry. On the 17th of the second month (Ḥeshvan), he had completed a full year in the

NAHMANIDES the dove. They are assuming that the trees *were* destroyed wherever the Flood reached. Certainly there were no fresh leaves. In fact another midrash says that everything down to and including the lower millstones was destroyed: "Water wears away stone" (Job 14:19). But even if the land of Israel was "not washed with rain" and the fountains of the deep below it did not open up, still, the whole world was covered with water above the tops of the mountains—as the text explicitly says—and there is no wall around the land of Israel to keep the water out. Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer makes precisely this point. R. Levi must have assumed that the trees were uprooted elsewhere but that the more gentle rise in the water level in the land of Israel did not do this kind of damage. As for the leaf coming from Paradise, how would such a leaf have told Noah that the waters had receded? The waters of the Flood did not enter Paradise. I suppose they may have been kept out by closing the gates, and when the waters receded the gates reopened. Note that this assumption that all plant life was uprooted prompted the midrash that Noah took shoots on board the ark that permitted him to plant a vineyard afterward. As for Rashi's comment, I do not think any of it is correct. Why would the text suddenly treat the dove as masculine in this one place, especially if the word is feminine everywhere else in the Bible? And the midrash is not saying that the dove spoke. It means to say that the fact that the leaf in the bird's bill was an olive communicated something to Noah. (After all, an olive is not one of the tall trees where birds nest.) The text did not have to tell us what kind of leaf it was. Since it does, the Sages read it symbolically: Birds would rather eat food that is bitter as wormwood but given them by the Holy One than take sweeter food from human hands—and if that is true for doves, how much more so for people, who do not want to be dependent on other people. R. Abbahu says further in Genesis Rabbah: If the dove was going to bring a leaf from Paradise, shouldn't it have brought something special, like a leaf of cinnamon or balsam? So he applies the same symbolism. The midrash Rashi cites was not translating but punning creatively. In any case, the straightforward sense is as the translations take it. The word is not an active verb or a noun, but an adjective: a *plucked-off* leaf. Grammatically this is quite clear, though this form is also found occasionally as a verb.

13 In the first month. Tishrei.

14 In the second month. Ḥeshvan. **On the twenty-seventh day of the month, the earth was dry.** This was the day they came out of the ark. Now you have a straightforward account of the entire chronology of the Flood, just as it is written in plain Hebrew. There is now general agreement that the world was created in Tishrei, as we see in the Rosh Hashanah prayer service. "Seedtime and harvest, cold

NJPS 15God spoke to Noah, saying, 16"Come out of the ark, together with your wife, your sons, and your sons' wives. 17Bring out with you every living thing of all flesh that is with you: birds, animals, and everything that creeps on earth; and let them swarm on the earth and be fertile and increase on earth." 18So Noah came out, together with his sons, his wife, and his sons' wives. 19Every animal, every creeping thing, and every bird, everything that stirs on earth came out of the ark by families.

20Then Noah built an altar to the LORD and, taking of every clean animal and of

OJPS 15And God spoke unto Noah, saying: 16"Go forth from the ark, thou, and thy wife, and thy sons, and thy sons' wives with thee. 17Bring forth with thee every living thing that is with thee of all flesh, both fowl, and cattle, and every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth; that they may swarm in the earth, and be fruitful, and multiply upon the earth." 18And Noah went forth, and his sons, and his wife, and his sons' wives with him; 19every beast, every creeping thing, and every fowl, whatsoever moveth upon the earth, after their families; went forth out of the ark.

20And Noah builded an altar unto the LORD; and took of every clean beast, and

רביעי

15 וַיְדַבֵּר אֱלֹהִים אֶל־נֹחַ לֵאמֹר׃ 16 צֵא
מִן־הַתֵּבָה אַתָּה וְאִשְׁתְּךָ וּבָנֶיךָ וּנְשֵׁי־בָנֶיךָ
אִתָּךְ׃ 17 כָּל־הַחַיָּה אֲשֶׁר־אִתְּךָ מִכָּל־בָּשָׂר
בָּעוֹף וּבַבְּהֵמָה וּבְכָל־הָרֶמֶשׂ הָרֹמֵשׂ עַל־
הָאָרֶץ הוצא הַיְצֵא אִתָּךְ וְשָׁרְצוּ בָאָרֶץ
וּפָרוּ וְרָבוּ עַל־הָאָרֶץ׃ 18 וַיֵּצֵא־נֹחַ וּבָנָיו
וְאִשְׁתּוֹ וּנְשֵׁי־בָנָיו אִתּוֹ׃ 19 כָּל־הַחַיָּה כָּל־
הָרֶמֶשׂ וְכָל־הָעוֹף כֹּל רוֹמֵשׂ עַל־הָאָרֶץ
לְמִשְׁפְּחֹתֵיהֶם יָצְאוּ מִן־הַתֵּבָה׃
20 וַיִּבֶן נֹחַ מִזְבֵּחַ לַיהוָה וַיִּקַּח מִכֹּל ׀
הַבְּהֵמָה הַטְּהוֹרָה וּמִכֹּל הָעוֹף הַטָּהֹר

RASHI 11 days by which the solar year exceeds the lunar one—for the sentence of the generation of the Flood lasted one full solar year. **The earth was dry.** Completely, as it had been. The Hebrew word used here is different from that in v. 13.

16 Together with your wife, your sons, and your sons' wives. Literally "*you* and your wife" (compare OJPS). This time the men are not grouped together but each with his wife. At this point, they were once again permitted to have sex.

17 Bring out. This translates the written text, הוצא; the text as it is to be read, היצא means "tell them to come out"; but if they don't want to come, you bring them out. **And let them swarm on the earth.** But not in the ark! This tells us that even the animals and birds were forbidden to have sex while on board.

19 By families. The implication is that they agreed not to interbreed.

20 Then Noah built an altar to the LORD and, taking of every clean animal and of every clean bird, he offered burnt offerings on the altar. He reasoned: The Holy One

KIMHI ark. By then the surface of the earth was dry, but the earth below was still moist, making it impossible to walk on. That is why God did not command him to leave the ark. And Noah knew that God would tell him when to come out of the ark just as He had told him when to go into it.

17 Bring out. The verb as written replaces the י with a ו, as the norm for פ״י roots; but instructions for reading it are that it is to be pronounced with the י, as it should really be. Compare "make Your way *straight* before me" (Ps. 5:9). **With you.** Noah was commanded to bring the animals out with him just as he had brought them in with him. **Let them swarm on the earth.** At the original creation, only the fish were given this command; now, because the land animals were so few, they too were instructed to swarm and to **be fertile and increase on earth.**

18 So Noah came out, together with his sons, his wife, and his sons' wives. The men first, perhaps because the women, being more timid, were still frightened of the Flood.

20 Then Noah built an altar. In the same place where he came out of the ark, either in the mountains of Ararat, or perhaps—if the ark had slid down from the mountains and continued to float for a while lower down, at some other place. Or perhaps, once the earth

RASHBAM **15 Saying.** This word is always used redundantly with a verb of speaking. **[B]**

[B] See Rashbam's comment to Lev. 1:1.

IBN EZRA extra 10 days are required for the Flood to have lasted exactly one solar year. But they would still have to assume that Ḥeshvan and Kislev had 30 days rather than 29. Besides, who told them that Noah spent precisely one year in the ark? Maybe he spent one solar year plus another 10 days! And anyway, it should be 11 days, not 10.

17 Bring out. The word that is to be read aloud here replaces the ו of the written text with י, as in roots where that is the original root letter. **[K]** Compare the Hebrew of "make Your way *straight* before me" (Ps. 5:9). **Let them swarm on the earth.** That is, let them "teem," let them have offspring.

19 By families. That is, by species. But some say that they reproduced while still in the ark, and that each animal "family" came out separately, not mixed with any of the others—which is not implausible.

20 Noah built an altar. On one of the mountains of Ararat. **Every clean animal.** Of which there were 10. **[L] Every clean bird.** We do not know the exact number of these, for there are more clean birds than

[K] Most verbs whose first letter is י come from roots where the first letter was originally ו. **[L]** See Deut. 14:4–5.

NAHMANIDES and heat" (v. 22) also points to Tishrei as the beginning of the cycle of the year. The months were counted from Tishrei until the time of the exodus, when the Holy One commanded differently: "This month shall mark for you the beginning of the months; it shall be the first of the months of the year for you" (Exod. 12:2). From that point on, the Bible identifies Tishrei as the seventh month, though the years continued to be counted as if they began in Tishrei, as when "the Feast of Ingathering" is said to begin "at the turn of the year" (Exod. 34:22). As the Mekilta says of Exod. 12:2, "For *you* this marks the beginning of the months. It was not the first month for Adam."

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **15 God spoke.** The phrase also appears only in Exod. 6:2 and 20:1 (Masorah).

18 Noah came out, together with his sons, his wife, and his sons' wives. With the men separated from the women, just as they had gone in (7:13), and not as they had been commanded to come out (here, v. 16). They were still reluctant to beget children, fearing that there would be another Flood (Abarbanel).

19 By families. Evidently the animals did breed while on board. They could hardly be expected to follow instructions not to (Gersonides).

20 Every clean animal. Moses called them this when he wrote the Torah; Noah selected them just because they were the finest animals (Abarbanel). **He offered burnt offerings on the altar.** As should all who "go down to the sea in ships," according to Ps. 107:22–23 (Hizkuni).

NJPS every clean bird, he offered burnt offerings on the altar. 21The LORD smelled the pleasing odor, and the LORD said to Himself: "Never again will I doom the earth because of man, since the devisings of man's mind are evil from his youth; nor will I ever again destroy every living being, as I have done.

וַיַּעַל עֹלֹת בַּמִּזְבֵּחַ׃ 21 וַיָּרַח יְהוָה אֶת־רֵיחַ הַנִּיחֹחַ וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־לִבּוֹ לֹא־אֹסִף לְקַלֵּל עוֹד אֶת־הָאֲדָמָה בַּעֲבוּר הָאָדָם כִּי יֵצֶר לֵב הָאָדָם רַע מִנְּעֻרָיו וְלֹא־אֹסִף עוֹד לְהַכּוֹת אֶת־כָּל־חַי כַּאֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתִי׃

OJPS of every clean fowl, and offered burnt-offerings on the altar. 21And the LORD smelled the sweet savor; and the LORD said in His heart: "I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake; for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; neither will I again smite any more every thing living, as I have done.

RASHI would not have commanded me to bring seven of each of these on board except to be able to offer sacrifice from them.

21 From his youth. The Hebrew noun is spelled in a way that permits it also to be read as "from his birth." The evil impulse is put into the embryo as it stirs to come forth from its mother's womb. **Ever again.** The twofold invocation "never again . . . nor ever again" implies the swearing of an oath, the oath referred to in "I swore that the waters of Noah nevermore would flood the earth" (Isa. 54:9). We do not find any place where the Holy One explicitly takes such an oath, so

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Does v. 21 really imply that the Lord promised never again to "doom the earth" just because He "smelled the pleasing odor"? That is bizarre—it is like bribery. ✦ If the promise is based not on smelling the pleasing odor but on Noah's own merit, how could that merit save all future generations when it could not even save the rest of his own generation? ✦ What does it mean for the Lord to say something "to Himself"? ✦ If it is true that "the devisings of man's mind are evil from his youth," and if that is a reason not to "destroy every living being," why did the Lord do it in the first place? But if He was right to punish them, why should He not do so again if conditions call for it? ✦ Isn't "the devisings of man's mind are evil from his youth" a good reason to punish humankind rather than a reason *not* to punish them? (See 6:5–7.) How can one and the same premise lead to two completely opposite conclusions? ✦ Why does God repeat that He will not "destroy every living being" after saying that He would not "doom the earth," which means exactly the same thing?

IBN EZRA unclean ones. **Offerings.** The Hebrew word is literally "uppings," since they go *up* on to the altar.

21 The LORD smelled the pleasing odor. God forbid that you imagine that the Holy One smells, let alone eats, like the ungods who the Israelites thought "ate the fat of their offerings" (Deut. 32:38). The phrase simply means that He accepted the offering and considered it a proper one, just *like* a man who smells a pleasant aroma and finds it sweet. The "pleasant" aroma of our verse comes from a root meaning "to rest." (For the double ח, compare the Hebrew of "adultery" in Hosea 2:4.) The aroma sweetened the foul atmosphere, or perhaps it was intended to draw down power from on high. **[M] The LORD said to Himself.** That is, He said it in His mind; only afterward did He also reveal it to Noah, who was indeed a prophet. **Never again will I doom the earth.** Never again will I "curse" it (OJPS), as it was originally cursed on account of Adam (see 3:17). **The devisings of man's mind.** Rather, the "nature" with which man was formed. **Nor will I ever again destroy every living being.** This is about the Flood. It may be saying "I will *never* do it again" or "I will not do it *a second time*," as the Hebrew word is used when Joseph saw his father and "wept on his neck *again*" (46:29). **[N]**

[M] Ibn Ezra's comment is obscure; this is one possible interpretation. **[N]** It is not clear that Joseph here is weeping for a second time. But see Ruth 1:9,14.

KIMHI was dry, Noah went away from the ark to find another place to settle, and built an altar there. **He offered burnt offerings.** In gratitude to God that they had not died in the Flood. **On the altar.** According to the midrash, this was "the" great altar in Jerusalem on which Adam himself had offered sacrifice.

21 The LORD smelled the pleasing odor. This is metaphoric, of course: "Do I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of he-goats?" (Ps. 50:13). But He sent a fire down from heaven to consume the sacrifice, showing that He found it acceptable and even pleasing. For now "the LORD rejoiced in His works" (Ps. 104:31), in contrast to the generation of the Flood, when "His heart was saddened" (6:6). He knew that there would never again be another generation like that one. But "pleasing odor" should really be "odor of calming." The Hebrew word is a noun, on the same pattern as "spark" in Isa. 1:31, not an adjective. The sense is that he calmed God's anger against the world. **The LORD said to Himself.** He understood rationally that He would never again have to destroy the earth, since there would never again be so many wicked people. They would learn a lesson from the generation of the Flood. He would not destroy everything because of the wickedness of a few. But if He found total wickedness in any particular place, He would still destroy it, as He did with Sodom. **Never again will I doom the earth because of man.** So that if the wicked were destroyed, the earth would remain for the benefit of the good. Even if a small part of the earth had to be destroyed—like the part on which Sodom and the other cities of the Plain stood—this would not amount to destruction of the earth. **The devisings of man's mind.** More literally, the "formation" of man's mind, since this aspect of his mind was formed along with him. **Evil from his youth.** For the inclination to evil is in a person before the

NAHMANIDES **21 The LORD said to Himself.** He did not reveal this to a prophet at that time; but when He commanded Moses to write down the Torah He revealed to him that when Noah offered his sacrifice it was accepted, and He decreed that He would never again destroy all life. As for "said to Himself," it is literally "said in His heart," on which see my comment to 6:6. **Because of man.** The animals were punished on man's account. Had humanity not sinned, the animals would have been spared despite having corrupted their ways. **Since the devisings of man's mind are evil from his youth.** This is stated as an argument in man's favor. "The formation of man's heart" (as the Hebrew can be taken) produces evil from his earliest youth—as the Sages have it, from the moment the fetus stirs to come forth from the womb—but not once he is older. For both these reasons, **[F]** every living being should not be destroyed. But the phrase might indeed refer to the devisings produced "from"—on account of—man's youth, which cause him to sin. Some would read the preposition to mean "in," during, his youth, for which there are also biblical examples.

[F] Nahmanides does not make clear what the two reasons are. Perhaps he means that (1) evil is part of human nature and (2) it applies only during youth.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **21 The LORD smelled the pleasing odor.** The verb appears in this form also only in 27:27, when Isaac smells the clothes of Esau on Jacob (Masorah). This is the end of the story of the offerings (Abarbanel). **The LORD said to Himself.** Literally, "to His heart." He now expressed His joy, just as He had expressed His sadness "to His heart" (as the Hebrew literally also says) in 6:6 (Hizkuni). This is completely separate from the offerings—not a result of them (Abarbanel). **Never again will I doom the earth because of man.** I will punish sinners but not destroy plants or animals; nature will take its course (Bekhor Shor). Since no one was left on earth but Noah and his family, the entire population of the world now knew the truth and those who would be born could be expected to learn it from them and behave correctly (Gersonides).

NJPS [22]So long as the earth endures,
Seedtime and harvest,
Cold and heat,
Summer and winter,
Day and night
Shall not cease."

9 God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them, "Be fertile and increase, and fill the earth. [2]The fear and the dread of you shall be upon all the beasts of the earth and upon all the birds of the sky—everything with which the earth is astir—and upon all the fish of the sea; they are given

OJPS [22]While the earth remaineth,
seedtime and harvest,
and cold and heat,
and summer and winter,
and day and night
shall not cease."

9 And God blessed Noah and his sons, and said unto them: "Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth. [2]And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth, and upon every fowl of the air, and upon all wherewith the ground teemeth, and upon all the fishes of the sea: into your hand are they

22 עֹ֚ד כָּל־יְמֵ֣י הָאָ֔רֶץ
זֶ֥רַע וְקָצִ֖יר
וְקֹ֣ר וָחֹ֑ם
וְקַ֥יִץ וָחֹ֖רֶף
וְיֹ֥ום וָלָ֖יְלָה
לֹ֥א יִשְׁבֹּֽתוּ׃

ט וַיְבָ֣רֶךְ אֱלֹהִ֗ים אֶת־נֹ֙חַ֙ וְאֶת־בָּנָ֔יו
וַיֹּ֥אמֶר לָהֶ֖ם פְּר֣וּ וּרְב֑וּ וּמִלְא֖וּ אֶת־הָאָֽרֶץ׃
2 וּמֹורַאֲכֶ֣ם וְחִתְּכֶ֗ם יִֽהְיֶ֤ה עַל֙ כָּל־חַ֣ית
הָאָ֔רֶץ וְעַ֖ל כָּל־עֹ֣וף הַשָּׁמָ֑יִם בְּכֹל֙ אֲשֶׁ֣ר
תִּרְמֹ֣שׂ הָאֲדָמָ֔ה וּבְכָל־דְּגֵ֥י הַיָּ֖ם בְּיֶדְכֶ֥ם

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ What does 8:22 have to do with this topic? Was there no "summer and winter" during the Flood?
✦ Haven't the blessings of vv. 1–3 already been given to humanity via Adam? Why must they be given here again?

RASHI this twofold repetition of "never again" must in fact be that oath. B. Shev. 36a discusses this phenomenon, citing our verse as an example.

22 Seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter. These are six periods of two months each, as we read on B. BM 106b: "The second half of Tishrei, all of Ḥeshvan, and the first half of Kislev is seedtime" and so forth. "Cold" (the rest of Kislev, Tevet, and half of Shevat) is harsher than "winter" (the rest of Shevat, Adar, and half of Nisan), the time for planting barley and legumes, which ripen quickly. "Harvest" is the rest of Nisan, Iyar, and half of Sivan. "Summer" (the rest of Sivan, Tammuz, and half of Av) is the time of gathering figs and drying them in the fields; in fact, the word that refers to such figs *is* the Hebrew word translated "summer" in our verse: "the bread and *figs*" (2 Sam. 16:2). The time of "heat" (the rest of Av, Elul, and half of Tishrei) is when the world is at its hottest. As our Sages say on B. Yoma 29a, "The end of summer is tougher than summer itself." **Day and night shall not cease.** As they did during the Flood, when the planets did not function and one could not even tell the difference between day and night. But (as the translations imply) the verb applies as well to all six seasons. They will never again cease occurring in their proper order.

9:2 The fear and the dread of you. A midrash links this word *ḥit'khem* ("dread") to *ḥayyut* ("life"): A day-old child, as long as he is alive, does not need to be protected from mice; but the giant Og, King of Bashan, once dead, would need to be protected from mice: "The fear and the dread of you shall be upon all the beasts (*ḥayyot*) of the earth"—and when? While you are alive (*ḥayyim*).

IBN EZRA **22 So long as the earth endures.** This implies that "the days of the earth" (as the Hebrew literally says) have a fixed end. In this connection, there is a profound midrash on the phrase "18,000 round about" (Ezek. 48:35). But we hardly understand even one-thousandth of this matter. **[O] Seedtime and harvest.** Dividing the year into two. **Cold and heat, summer and winter.** And now dividing it into four; these four words represent the four seasons. **Day and night.** These are divided among the seasons; what one lacks in this season it makes up in the opposite season. The day lengthens and the night shortens, and then they become equal again, and then day shortens and night lengthens. But the discrepancy is always made up and everything ends up equal.

9:2 Everything with which the earth is astir. Alternatively, "everything that stirs upon the earth." **They are given into your hand.** It is unusual for Biblical Hebrew that we find no conjunction before this phrase. Presumably the sense is "the fear and the dread of you shall be upon them . . . *for* they

[O] Some take Ibn Ezra to be saying "not one in a thousand knows about it," referring to a passage about 18,000 righteous men who stand before God. But this is stated clearly on B. Suk. 45b and B. Sanh. 97b. Ibn Ezra seems to be hinting at 18,000 as a clue to the date of the end of the world.

KIMHI inclination to good, which must be acquired little by little as one matures. (The Sages discuss whether "from his youth" means from the formation of the embryo or from birth.) "Since in My wisdom I decided to create man in this way, as the reality of nature demands, I cannot go on destroying all life on his account as I did."

22 So long as the earth endures. See the comment of Ibn Ezra.

9:1 God blessed Noah and his sons. Even though humanity had been blessed at the beginning of creation, the earth had returned to being "unformed and void" (1:2) when it was covered with water, so this was the equivalent of being created anew.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **22 So long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night shall not cease.** Before the Flood, when the sun traveled along the equator, it was always spring. Now, the off-kilter pattern created by moving the sun will be in effect as long as the earth endures—until the time of "the new heaven and the new earth which I will make" (Isa. 66:22), when the sun will return its normal place and things will be back in order. Then, "he who dies at a hundred years shall be reckoned a youth, and he who fails to reach a hundred shall be reckoned accursed" (Isa. 65:20) (Sforno).

9:1 God blessed Noah and his sons. When they came out of the ark, they were grieving for the friends and relatives they had lost, and frightened of what might happen in the future—there was nothing on earth to eat, and they were also worried that one of the brothers might kill another, as Cain had killed Abel (Abarbanel).

2 The fear and the dread of you shall be upon all the beasts of the earth. Apparently, when the Holy One hid His face from the previous generations because of their wickedness, the animals would sometimes eat them (Gersonides). You need not worry that you are vulnerable to them (Abarbanel).

NJPS into your hand. 3Every creature that lives shall be yours to eat; as with the green grasses, I give you all these. 4You must not, however, eat flesh with its life-blood in it. 5But for your own life-blood I will require a reckoning: I will require it of every beast; of man, too, will I require a reckoning for human life, of every man for that of his fellow man!

נִתָּנוּ׃ 3 כָּל־רֶמֶשׂ אֲשֶׁר הוּא־חַי לָכֶם יִהְיֶה
לְאָכְלָה כִּירֶק עֵשֶׂב נָתַתִּי לָכֶם אֶת־כֹּל׃
4 אַךְ־בָּשָׂר בְּנַפְשׁוֹ דָמוֹ לֹא תֹאכֵלוּ׃ 5 וְאַךְ
אֶת־דִּמְכֶם לְנַפְשֹׁתֵיכֶם אֶדְרֹשׁ מִיַּד כָּל־
חַיָּה אֶדְרְשֶׁנּוּ וּמִיַּד הָאָדָם מִיַּד אִישׁ אָחִיו
אֶדְרֹשׁ אֶת־נֶפֶשׁ הָאָדָם׃

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why was Noah permitted to eat meat (v. 3) when Adam was not? ✦ What is the meaning of the strange expression in v. 4, which literally says "flesh with its blood in its life"? The life is in the blood, not vice versa! ✦ Isn't it redundant to require "a reckoning for human life" and then to repeat "every man for that of his fellow man" (v. 5)?

OJPS delivered. 3Every moving thing that liveth shall be for food for you; as the green herb have I given you all. 4Only flesh with the life thereof, which is the blood thereof, shall ye not eat. 5And surely your blood of your lives will I require; at the hand of every beast will I require it; and at the hand of man, even at the hand of every man's brother, will I require the life of man.

RASHI **3 Every creature that lives shall be yours to eat.** Though I did not permit Adam to eat meat, only "the green grasses." **As with the green grasses, I give you all these.** Now they fall into the edible category, as only "the green grasses" did for Adam.

4 You must not, however, eat flesh with its life-blood in it. He forbade them to eat a limb torn from a living animal. That is, as long as the life-blood is in the flesh, you must not eat it. The Hebrew more literally says, "as long as the flesh is [still] with its life, [that is,] its blood" (compare OJPS). The "flesh" here is the limb torn from a living animal; but "its blood" implies also that one may not eat blood taken from a living animal.

5 But for your own life-blood I will require a reckoning. Even though I have now permitted you to take an animal's life, I will still require a reckoning for human blood from the one who sheds it, even "your [own] lives" and even if no blood is involved—as with one who strangles himself. (See OJPS, which makes clear that "life" and "blood" are in separate phrases here.) **I will require it of every beast.** Since the wild animals were turned loose on the generation of the Flood, to treat them "like the beasts that perish" (Ps. 49:13), the animals now had to be warned that they were no longer permitted to eat the

KIMHI **4 You must not, however, eat flesh with its life-blood in it.** That is, you must slaughter the animal before you eat it. Cutting flesh off a living animal to eat is cruel. Apparently Noah was given the right to eat meat in return for having kept the animals alive. After all, they had been created for humanity to use, whether for work or as food.

5 But for your own life-blood. The Sages interpret this to mean that one who commits suicide is punished in the World to Come. **I will require a reckoning: I will require it of every beast.** Unless the beast has killed by My will, as in the cases of the man of God who flouted the Lord's command and the boys who jeered at Elisha, **[C]** or the more

[C] See 1 Kings 13 and 2 Kings 2 respectively.

IBN EZRA are given into your hand." But others would read the verse this way: "The fear and the dread of you shall be upon all the beasts of the earth, *and* all the birds of the sky . . . *and* all the fish of the sea are given into your hand." But the first interpretation is the more plausible.

3 Every creature. OJPS translates more literally, but NJPS has the sense.

4 Flesh with its life-blood in it. Again, OJPS translates more literally: "flesh with the life thereof, which is the blood thereof." Compare "But make sure that you do not partake of the blood; for the blood is the life, and you must not consume the life with the flesh" (Deut. 12:23); "For the life of all flesh—its blood is its life. Therefore I say to the Israelite people: You shall not partake of the blood of any flesh, for the life of all flesh is its blood" (Lev. 17:14). This "life" is the animative, perceptive force—the physical aspect of life.

5 But for your own life-blood I will require a reckoning. That is: I permit you to spill the blood of every living thing but for the "blood of your [own] lives" (OJPS). For you are the children of Adam, and that I do not permit. "Reckoning" is not in the Hebrew, but that is indeed the sense, as in "He who *requites* bloodshed is mindful of them" (Ps. 9:13). All this is the general statement, after which the verse continues with further explanation. **I will require it of every beast; of man, too, will I require a reckoning for human life, of every man for that of his fellow man.** The more literal

NAHMANIDES **9:3 Every creature that lives.** Animals, birds, and fish—for each of them is a "moving thing" (OJPS), the flying and swimming creatures as well (see 1:21).

4 Flesh with its life-blood in it. Rashi's comment would seem to demand "with its life *and* blood in it"; it is not a straightforward explanation of the text as it stands, nor is it legally correct. For the Noahide law prohibits eating flesh torn from a living animal, but not (despite R. Hananiah b. Gamaliel) blood from a living animal. Our verse is explaining that the life of the flesh is its blood (see OJPS, and compare Lev. 17:14).

5 Your own life-blood. For your own blood, which is your life. The preposition (translated "of" by OJPS) is superfluous here, as we find it used in the Hebrew of Exod. 27:19 and 1 Chron. 3:2. But we might retain the preposition by translating it as "in": your blood, which is *in* your person. This is what Lev. 17:14 literally says; **[G]** for a similar usage, see the Hebrew of "of bird or of animal" (Lev. 7:26). But correctly understood the verse is saying that one who spills blood and thereby takes a life incurs the death penalty. It does not refer to causing blood to flow in a way that does not endanger life. (The Sages take "your own" to imply suicide.) **I will require it of every beast.** It is hard to take this seriously if it literally means that a beast would be punished for murder as a human being is. Animals do not have rational thought and cannot be punished or rewarded. But perhaps they are treated as if they did—by royal decree—in this one case, where an animal kills a human being and therefore must itself be killed: "When an ox gores a man or a woman to death, the ox shall be stoned and its flesh shall not be eaten" (Exod. 21:28). Note that (as the Exodus verse continues) this is not to punish the owner of the ox; the same rule applies if the ox is a wild one. Our verse would be saying that this applies to all descendants of Noah, not merely to Jews. So a

[G] See Nahmanides' comment to that verse.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **3 As with the green grasses.** "As with the green grasses," some of which are edible and some not, so too some of the animals are edible and some not (Hizkuni). Otherwise there would have been nothing for them to eat for a year or more; plants take a long time to grow (Abarbanel).

5 But for your own life-blood I will require a reckoning. They should not think, "We saved animals and are therefore allowed to kill them; since we also saved ourselves, we are allowed to kill ourselves" (Bekhor Shor). **I will require it of every beast.** Rather, "I may require it *from*—'at the hand of' [OJPS]—any beast." I can arrange for animals to kill anyone who murders a human being

NJPS 6Whoever sheds the blood of man,
By man shall his blood be shed;
For in His image
Did God make man.

OJPS 6Whoso sheddeth man's blood,
by man shall his blood be shed;
for in the image
of God made He man.

6 שֹׁפֵךְ דַּם הָאָדָם
בָּאָדָם דָּמוֹ יִשָּׁפֵךְ
כִּי בְצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים
עָשָׂה אֶת־הָאָדָם׃

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ What is the meaning of requiring such a reckoning and of insisting that "whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed" (v. 6) if the commandment not to murder is not given until Exodus 20? What does it have to do with their leaving the ark?

RASHI humans as they eat other animals. **Of man, too, will I require a reckoning for human life.** When one human deliberately kills another but there are no witnesses, *I* will require the reckoning. **Of every man for that of his fellow man.** One who genuinely loves him like a "brother" (OJPS), but kills him by accident. If he is not exiled and does not seek forgiveness, I will require a reckoning of him too, for even accidental killing demands expiation. — If there are no witnesses to send him into exile and he does not go voluntarily, the Holy One will require a reckoning from him. This is how our Sages of blessed memory explain the killing that "came about by an act of God" (Exod. 21:13). B. Mak. 10b explains how it works. **[K]**

6 By man shall his blood be shed. If there are witnesses to the crime, you must execute him yourselves. And why? **For in His image did God make man.** The Hebrew is more literally "in the image of God made man" (compare OJPS); it is an abbreviated verse, which should really say "in the image of God, the Maker made man." This kind of syntax is quite common in the Bible.

[K] The Holy One arranges for the accidental killer and the deliberate killer (both, with no witnesses) to end up in the same inn. The deliberate killer is at the bottom of the stairs and the accidental killer, at the top, falls on him and kills him. So the deliberate killer suffers his death penalty, and the accidental killer is sent into the exile he already deserved.

IBN EZRA "at the hand of man, even at the hand of every man's brother" (OJPS) presents two cases: (1) many people kill a single individual; (2) one individual kills another. In either case, "I require a reckoning." So too "I will require it of every beast," by having another animal kill it. You are permitted to kill animals, but they are not permitted to kill you.

6 Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed. "By man" could mean "by virtue of man," that is, by means of witnesses; or "among mankind," that is, publicly; or "for man," that is, on account of the man whose blood he shed. The latter usage is quite common. If that is the case, then this further elaborates God's requiring a reckoning; alternatively, and more correctly, what follows is a commandment given to the descendants of Noah. They are required to kill a killer. I consider it extremely implausible that "for your own life-blood" here is about suicide.

KIMHI general case when "I will loose wild beasts against you, and they shall bereave you of your children" (Lev. 26:22). The way this is "required" of beasts is that the beast who killed is killed in return, whether by another beast or by a human being. Even though reward and punishment does not apply to any living creatures other than human beings, who possess rational intelligence, there *is* reward and punishment for animals to the extent that they are involved with human beings, as in the "man of God" story, when "He set out and found the corpse lying on the road, with the ass and the lion standing beside the corpse; the lion had not eaten the corpse nor had it mauled the ass" (1 Kings 13:28).

6 Whoever sheds the blood of man, By man shall his blood be shed. If there are witnesses, the judges are responsible for killing the one who is found guilty of killing. It is only when there are no witnesses that "I will require a reckoning" (v. 5). **For in His image did God make man.** And they are the highest ranking of all the lower creatures, and must be treated as such by the other creatures and by each other. Anyone who kills a man has destroyed God's most prized handiwork. It was not permitted even to kill animals until the Holy One gave that permission to Noah, and for that matter even plants could not be destroyed until permission was granted to Adam and Eve: "See, I give you every seed-bearing plant that is upon all the earth, and every tree that has seed-bearing fruit; they shall be yours for food" (1:29). God *did* command in the Torah that man's blood was to be shed if he committed certain sins; violating God's commandments is in itself a destruction of God's image. A transgressor is not in God's image nor is he rational.

NAHMANIDES reckoning for the victim's blood can be required whether the killer is a beast or a man—either by a human court or by heaven. But our phrase could mean that revenge is taken for spilling human blood *by means* of any beast, as the Hebrew expression is used (more literally) in "she has received *at the hand of* the LORD double for all her sins" (Isa. 40:2). The text would be saying: I may send any beast to take revenge on the murderer—or indeed (as the verse continues) I may send a man. There would be no escape from either of them. Or perhaps what is "required" of the beasts is that they not attack human beings as is their nature to do. What lies behind all this is 1:29–30, where God says that both animals and humans are to eat plants, "and it was so" (1:30)—that became their natural instinct. Now that humans were permitted to slaughter animals, and now that the nature (or behavior) of animals was also changed so that some of them eat other animals, it was necessary to command that animals become food for humans but that they fear humans, who must not be "a prey to their teeth" (Ps. 124:6). **[H]** Requiring a reckoning "for your own life-blood" might therefore, in context, imply that an animal killed and eaten by another animal would by contrast *not* demand a reckoning.

6 Whoever sheds the blood of man. Whoever it is, whether man or beast; see the previous comment. The point is that slaughtering animals for meat, specifically by spilling their blood, is now permitted, so it must be emphasized that this does not mean that spilling human blood was now permitted. (According to tradition, Adam himself was cautioned against shedding blood.) Humans were now permitted to kill animals, but neither they nor the animals are permitted to kill humans. And indeed it would not be natural for animals to do so.

[H] See Nahmanides' comment to "I will give the land respite from vicious beasts" (Lev. 26:6).

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS (Gersonides). **Of every man for that of his fellow man.** Literally, "of every man's brother" (OJPS), an allusion to their fears that the Cain and Abel story would repeat itself (Abarbanel).

6 In His image. Literally, "in the image of God" (see OJPS), a phrase that occurs also only in 1:27 (Masorah). This is why human lives are treated differently than those of animals; the animals were not made "in His image" (Gersonides).

NJPS 7Be fertile, then, and increase; abound on the earth and increase on it."

8And God said to Noah and to his sons with him, 9"I now establish My covenant with you and your offspring to come, 10and with every living thing that is with you—birds, cattle, and every wild beast as well—all that have come out of the ark, every living thing on earth. 11I will maintain My covenant with you: never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth."

OJPS 7And you, be ye fruitful, and multiply; swarm in the earth, and multiply therein."

8And God spoke unto Noah, and to his sons with him, saying: 9"As for Me, behold, I establish My covenant with you, and with your seed after you; 10and with every living creature that is with you, the fowl, the cattle, and every beast of the earth with you; of all that go out of the ark, even every beast of the earth. 11And I will establish My covenant with you; neither shall all flesh be cut off any more by the waters of the flood; neither shall there any more be a flood to destroy the earth."

7 וְאַתֶּם פְּרוּ וּרְבוּ שִׁרְצוּ בָאָרֶץ וּרְבוּ־
בָהּ׃ ס חמישי
8 וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים אֶל־נֹחַ וְאֶל־בָּנָיו אִתּוֹ
לֵאמֹר׃ 9 וַאֲנִי הִנְנִי מֵקִים אֶת־בְּרִיתִי
אִתְּכֶם וְאֶת־זַרְעֲכֶם אַחֲרֵיכֶם׃ 10 וְאֵת
כָּל־נֶפֶשׁ הַחַיָּה אֲשֶׁר אִתְּכֶם בָּעוֹף
בַּבְּהֵמָה וּבְכָל־חַיַּת הָאָרֶץ אִתְּכֶם מִכֹּל
יֹצְאֵי הַתֵּבָה לְכֹל חַיַּת הָאָרֶץ׃ 11 וַהֲקִמֹתִי
אֶת־בְּרִיתִי אִתְּכֶם וְלֹא־יִכָּרֵת כָּל־בָּשָׂר
עוֹד מִמֵּי הַמַּבּוּל וְלֹא־יִהְיֶה עוֹד מַבּוּל
לְשַׁחֵת הָאָרֶץ׃

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why must v. 7 repeat the command of v. 1 to "Be fertile, then, and increase"? ✦ Why does v. 8 tell us that "God said [the following] to Noah and to his sons" when He was already speaking to them? ✦ Why do these words come to Noah "and to his sons," when previously God spoke only to Noah? ✦ Why does v. 9 speak about "covenant" again? ✦ Why must vv. 9–11 say "with you" four times (see OJPS)?

RASHI **7 Be fertile, then, and increase.** The straightforward sense is that the original "Be fertile and increase" of v. 1 was a blessing and this one is a commandment. The midrash explains the context here to mean that deliberately not having children is comparable to shedding blood.

9 I now establish My covenant. More literally, "For My part, I am about to establish My covenant." Noah was worried that it would not be a good idea to have any more children until the Holy One made a covenant to protect him. "For My part, I am about to" introduces a promise of protection—"I will never again destroy all life, and I will give you a sign confirming My promise," which He does in vv. 12–17.

10 And with every living thing that is with you. Those that are domesticated. **All that have come out of the ark.** This phrase adds the swarming and crawling creatures. **Every living thing on earth.** "Living thing" is the same word used elsewhere for "wild animal," those that are not found in the company of humans, who are therefore also included in this covenant.

IBN EZRA **8 And God said to Noah and to his sons.** "To his sons" indirectly, via their father, though some say all four of them were prophets.

10 Birds, cattle, and every wild beast as well. The Hebrew adds "with you" yet again (compare OJPS), either to mean "those that will be with you" or for stylistic reasons.

11 All flesh. "Flesh" refers to the parts of the body that have sensation, for the bones do not have sensation. **Never again shall all flesh be cut off.** This is the beginning of the covenant promised in v. 9. **By the waters of a flood.** He might simply have promised that if there were another such flood He would rescue them; instead, He promised by means of a covenant that there would never again be such a flood. This

11 I will maintain My covenant. The Hebrew more literally says "I am establishing" in v. 9 and "I will establish" here, implying, as OJPS suggests, that the Holy One is promising here to continue to "maintain" the covenant that He promised in v. 9 to establish. The

KIMHI **7 Be fertile, then, and increase.** There were so few of them when they came out of the ark that this had to be emphasized.

8 His sons with him. They too had to know what the Holy One was promising to them and to all the other creatures.

9 I now establish My covenant. You be fertile and increase and populate the world; I, for My part, will make sure the population of the world is not destroyed again.

10 With you. In the ark, as the verse goes on to explain. **All that have come out of the ark.** My covenant, that I will never again destroy them, applies to every species that was with you.

11 I will maintain My covenant with you. The Hebrew is the same as in v. 9 (see OJPS). But that was merely a declaration that there would be a covenant; the contents of the covenant are given here. **Never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood.** Though some creatures may still be killed by driving rain, there will never be another Flood that destroys all flesh. **Never again shall**

NAHMANIDES **7 Be fertile, then, and increase.** The straightforward sense is the same as the midrash: this is a commandment. The similar phrases in v. 1 and 1:28 are blessings. Indeed, the fish are given such a blessing in 1:22. We have already seen, in 8:17, that the other animals should "be fertile and increase"; here the human beings are told, "You should also do so." **Abound on the earth and increase on it.** The commandment is repeated in different words for emphasis. They should make great efforts to increase the population. Or it may mean that they should settle the entire world; see my comment to "fill the earth" (1:28). The midrash mentioned by Rashi comes from the juxtaposition with v. 6. The straightforward sense is that our verse is a commandment, and that is the rabbinic interpretation of the verse as well.

8 And God said to Noah and to his sons with him. He said it to Noah's sons via their father; they themselves were not prophets. Certainly Ham never attained the level of prophecy. Similarly "the LORD spoke to Ahaz" (Isa. 7:10) via Isaiah, just as He did earlier in that chapter; when we read "the LORD said to Moses and Aaron" (e.g., Exod. 12:1), He "said" it (as the Sages explain) to Moses and told Moses to say it to Aaron. In our passage, v. 17 clearly writes "God said to Noah."

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **7 Be fertile, then, and increase.** In context, this means: "Do not kill each other and decrease, but be fertile and increase" (Bekhor Shor). You will replace the friends and relatives you lost with others from your own descendants. Now that I have addressed your other concerns, you have no reason not to beget children (Abarbanel). **Abound on the earth and increase on it.** "Abound" on it by spreading out to different regions, so there will be no jealousy and no competition among you (Abarbanel).

8 God said to Noah and to his sons. Apparently they were not yet persuaded that everything was all right (Abarbanel).

11 I will maintain My covenant with you. The promise would extend to "every living thing" (v. 10), but the covenant was with

NJPS [12]God further said, "This is the sign that I set for the covenant between Me and you, and every living creature with you, for all ages to come. [13]I have set My bow in the clouds, and it shall serve as a sign of the covenant between Me and the earth. [14]When I bring clouds over the earth,

OJPS [12]And God said: "This is the token of the covenant which I make between Me and you and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations: [13]I have set My bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between Me and the earth. [14]And it shall come to pass, when I bring clouds over the earth,

[12] וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים זֹאת אוֹת־הַבְּרִית אֲשֶׁר־
אֲנִי נֹתֵן בֵּינִי וּבֵינֵיכֶם וּבֵין כָּל־נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה
אֲשֶׁר אִתְּכֶם לְדֹרֹת עוֹלָם׃ [13] אֶת־קַשְׁתִּי
נָתַתִּי בֶּעָנָן וְהָיְתָה לְאוֹת בְּרִית בֵּינִי וּבֵין
הָאָרֶץ׃ [14] וְהָיָה בְּעַנְנִי עָנָן עַל־הָאָרֶץ

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why must v. 12 tell us yet again that "God *further* said"? ✦ How can the rainbow be a "sign" when it is a completely natural phenomenon of sunlight refracting off the water droplets in the air? Ezekiel knew all about it (see Ezek. 1:28), and our Sages go so far as to say that the rainbow was one of the things created at twilight on the sixth day. How could a rainbow promise them anything? ✦ For this sign to be reassuring, shouldn't it appear when there is heavy rain, rather than when the sun has already broken forth? But a rainbow, of course, cannot naturally do this.

RASHI actual act of establishing the covenant, as the Holy One goes on to explain, is setting His bow in the clouds.

12 For all ages to come. "Ages" is spelled here lacking the ו that would ordinarily be expected to appear twice in the word. For there are some "generations" (OJPS) that were completely righteous and needed no sign, like those of King Hezekiah of Judah and R. Simeon b. Yohai.

14 When I bring clouds. Literally, "when I becloud a cloud." When it occurs in thought before Me to bring darkness and gloom to the world.

IBN EZRA is the covenant to which "I swore that the waters of Noah nevermore would flood the earth" (Isa. 54:9) refers.

12 The sign. The word is marked here grammatically as feminine, but it occurs elsewhere as masculine.

13 I have set My bow in the clouds. I have just done so. — It is not, as Saadia thinks, that the bow He had set in the heavens at the beginning of creation would now become a sign.

14 When I bring clouds over the earth. Despite the missing *dagesh* in the first נ, the verb here ("to becloud") is a Piel. **And the bow appears.** If we are to believe the words of the Greek scientists, that the rainbow is produced by the blazing of the

KIMHI **there be a flood to destroy the earth.** There will never be the kind of rain that brought on this Flood. If there were, it would undoubtedly destroy the earth again.

12 This is the sign that I set for the covenant between Me and you, and every living creature with you, for all ages to come. You need not be afraid of a Flood when it rains, for you will see this sign.

13 I have set My bow. That is, the bow that will serve as My sign. — According to this explanation, the verb is better understood as "I will [now] set," just as it is used in "Let me [now] pay the price" (23:13). But Saadia takes it literally as "I *have* set" (see Ibn Ezra's comment). The rainbow was certainly not visible during the 40 days of unrelenting rain, so this is a promise that the bow would definitely be visible (again) from now on. "My bow" may also refer to what Ezekiel saw: "the appearance of the bow which shines in the clouds on a day of rain" (Ezek. 1:28). As to how this jibes with the scientific explanation, see Ibn Ezra's comment to "and the bow appears" (v. 14). In any case, this point about the bow in the clouds will be repeated a second and again a third time to fix the sign in their hearts.

14 When I bring clouds over the earth. Through the intermediate causes that I command. The Hebrew literally says, "When I cloud clouds"; using a verb and noun from the same root is an extremely common phenomenon in Hebrew (and so is the disappearance of the *dagesh* that would normally be expected in this Piel verb). **And the bow appears.** Literally, it "is seen" by human beings.

NAHMANIDES **12 This is the sign that I set for the covenant.** The implication is that there was no such thing as a rainbow in the original creation, and now God created something new: a rainbow in the sky on a cloudy day. Some say that the rainbow was deliberately made not with the legs of its arc upward, so that it would seem to be shooting from heaven and aiming at the earth; rather, He made it the opposite way, to show that it was not shooting from heaven. Earthly fighters do the same, reversing their bows when they wish to make an offer of peace to their antagonists. Moreover, the rainbow has no string on which to notch arrows. We must accept the teachings of the Greeks, who say that the rainbow is a natural phenomenon created by the shining of the sun's rays on the moist air, since something like a rainbow appears even in a container of water on which the sun is shining. We can understand this when we examine the language of the text more closely; see my next comment.

13 I have set My bow in the clouds. Not "I am setting" (as v. 12 literally says about the sign) but "I have set." Calling it "My" bow tells us that this was a bow He already had. We should therefore understand this passage as follows: "The bow that I set in the clouds on the day I created the world shall be, from this day forward, **a sign of the covenant between Me and the earth.** Whenever I see it, I will remember the covenant of peace between Me and you." If you are wondering what makes a rainbow a "sign," it is like what we see in "You are to accept these seven ewes from me as proof that I dug this well" (21:30) and "this mound shall be witness and this pillar shall be witness" (31:52). Any object that is set before two sides to remind them of what they have promised each other is called a "sign," and every agreement can be called a "covenant." When God tells Abraham, "You shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin, and that shall be the *sign* of the *covenant* between Me and you" (17:11), it represents an agreement that all of Abraham's offspring will be circumcised, to "serve Him with one accord" (Zeph. 3:9). Moreover, when you see that the bow is reversed (as I mentioned in my comment to v. 12), that will be a reminder of peace. No matter whether the bow was set there now or was naturally always there, the symbolism is the same. But our Sages in Genesis Rabbah hint at a profound mystery in this sign: "'I have set My bow [*kashti*] in the clouds—My likeness [*kishuti*], something that can be likened to Me.' Is that even possible? Can straw [*kash*] be likened to grain?" **[I]** Their further statement about the divine aspect of justice being strict [*kasheh*] will be elucidated in what follows.

14 When I bring clouds over the earth. So that His face does not shine on it, because of the sins of those who live on it.

[I] Nahmanides and Genesis Rabbah both seem here to be alluding to Ezekiel's vision: "Like the appearance of the bow which shines in the clouds on a day of rain, such was the appearance of the surrounding radiance. That was the appearance of the semblance of the Presence of the LORD" (Ezek. 1:28). We omit much of Nahmanides' presentation here of rabbinic texts.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS humanity alone. It would not be fitting for the Holy One to make a covenant with dumb animals, but only with man, who was created in His image (Abarbanel).

12 God further said, "This is the sign that I set for the covenant." Noah and his sons were already reassured by the establishment of the covenant, but "the LORD was pleased, for His righteousness' sake" (Isa. 42:21), to go further and give them this reliable sign (Abarbanel).

NJPS and the bow appears in the clouds, [15]I will remember My covenant between Me and you and every living creature among all flesh, so that the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. [16]When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures, all flesh that is on earth. [17]That," God said to Noah, "shall be the sign of the covenant that I have established between Me and all flesh that is on earth."

[18]The sons of Noah who came out of the ark were Shem, Ham, and Japheth—

וְנִרְאֲתָה הַקֶּשֶׁת בֶּעָנָן׃ [15] וְזָכַרְתִּי אֶת־
בְּרִיתִי אֲשֶׁר בֵּינִי וּבֵינֵיכֶם וּבֵין כָּל־נֶפֶשׁ
חַיָּה בְּכָל־בָּשָׂר וְלֹא־יִהְיֶה עוֹד הַמַּיִם
לְמַבּוּל לְשַׁחֵת כָּל־בָּשָׂר׃ [16] וְהָיְתָה
הַקֶּשֶׁת בֶּעָנָן וּרְאִיתִיהָ לִזְכֹּר בְּרִית עוֹלָם
בֵּין אֱלֹהִים וּבֵין כָּל־נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה בְּכָל־בָּשָׂר
אֲשֶׁר עַל־הָאָרֶץ׃ [17] וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים אֶל־נֹחַ
זֹאת אוֹת־הַבְּרִית אֲשֶׁר הֲקִמֹתִי בֵּינִי וּבֵין
כָּל־בָּשָׂר אֲשֶׁר עַל־הָאָרֶץ׃ פ ששי
[18] וַיִּהְיוּ בְנֵי־נֹחַ הַיֹּצְאִים מִן־הַתֵּבָה שֵׁם

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Can God really (God forbid) need a sign to remind Him to "remember My covenant" (v. 15)? ✦ Isn't v. 16 completely redundant? ✦ What is the point of "this is the token of the covenant" (v. 17, in the more literal OJPS translation)? If "this" is the rainbow, it is simply repeating v. 12. If "this" is something else, I sure wish the text had told us about it! ✦ Who was the oldest, and who the youngest, of "Shem, Ham, and Japheth" (v. 18)?

OJPS and the bow is seen in the cloud, [15]that I will remember My covenant, which is between Me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh. [16]And the bow shall be in the cloud; and I will look upon it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth." [17]And God said unto Noah: "This is the token of the covenant which I have established between Me and all flesh that is upon the earth."

[18]And the sons of Noah, that went forth from the ark, were Shem, and Ham, and

RASHI **16 Between God and all living creatures.** Since it does not say "between *Me* and all living creatures," the use of *elohim* here must refer to the divine aspect of justice. So midrashically the implication is: "When the divine aspect of justice comes to bring an accusation against you, I will see the sign and remember the covenant."

17 "That," God said to Noah, "shall be the sign of the covenant." He showed him the bow and said to him, "That is the sign I told you about."

18 Ham being the father of Canaan. Why did this have to be said here? Because this passage is about to tell of the drunkenness of Noah, during which Ham acted disgracefully, causing Canaan to be cursed. At this point, Ham's genealogy has not yet been given, so we would not know that Canaan was his son. That is why it had to be written here.

RASHBAM **9:18 Ham being the father of Canaan.** This is the paradigmatic example of foreshadowing, presenting readers with information they will need to know only later on. **[C]** Otherwise, when Noah

[C] See Rashbam's comment to 26:15.

IBN EZRA sun, we would have to assume that the Holy One increased the sun's light after the Flood. In fact, this is the correct path to follow for one who is philosophically minded.

15 The waters shall never again become a flood. The verb is singular and "waters" is plural, but this proves nothing; you can find the same phenomenon in the Hebrew of "there were some men" of Num. 9:6.

16 When the bow is in the clouds. Rather, "the bow shall be in the cloud" (OJPS). It is always hidden there, but the Holy One sees it. When the people on earth see it, they will know that the rain is about to stop. And of course they will realize that the Holy One sees it too.

17 That. What I have just told you. **[P]** **The covenant that I have established.** The oath that I have established between us.

18 Ham being the father of Canaan. The implication is that both were evil; sons follow their fathers' paths. Canaan is mentioned here rather than Cush, Ham's firstborn, because it is Canaan who will be cursed. This whole story is written here because the Canaanites—male and female alike—were cursed already from the time of Noah. Remember what Abraham said: "You shall not get a wife for my son from the

[P] In the later commentary, Ibn Ezra says "that" is God showing the rainbow to Noah.

KIMHI **15 I will remember.** See my comment to "God remembered" of 8:1.

16 When the bow is in the clouds. See Ibn Ezra's comment. **I will see it and remember.** See again my comment to 8:1. **Between God and all living creatures.** That is, "between Me and all living creatures." The Holy One sometimes refers to Himself in the third person, as when He said to Moses, "Come up to the LORD" (Exod. 24:1). He calls Himself *elohim* ("judge") here because it is precisely when the people are so wicked as to deserve a sentence of destruction for their wickedness that the Holy One will "remember" and refrain from destroying them.

17 That shall be the sign of the covenant. Saying it a third time was to reassure Noah that it was an absolutely unconditional promise. Genesis Rabbah identifies the six occurrences of the word "covenant" in this chapter as an allusion to the six days of creation. (Actually, there are seven; but at least one must be left with its straightforward meaning in the original context.)

18 The sons of Noah who came out of the ark were Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Notice that they have no "generations" at this point, as we might expect in a notice of this kind; only afterward will they produce offspring and populate the earth. **Ham being the father of Canaan.** This is included for narrative purposes, since the story of Noah and the wine will follow immediately.

NAHMANIDES **16 When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the covenant.** The bow [*keshet*]—representing My attribute of strict justice—will appear in the clouds, but then I will remember the covenant and My attribute of mercy, and will take pity on the innocent children. — So obviously this sign and covenant are the same as the sign of circumcision and the covenant that goes with it. Note that the words of the text fit nicely with this idea. **Between God and all living creatures, all flesh that is on earth.** The word *elohim*—translated as "God" here—elsewhere means "judges," and represents the divine aspect of justice; but "on earth" that aspect operates only tempered by the aspect of mercy. The Hebrew preposition is not "in" the earth (see the remarks about "earth" in my second comment to 6:13), but "on" the (geographical) earth, our world. The midrash was not meant to imply what Rashi says.

18 Ham being the father of Canaan. See Rashi's comment. And Ibn Ezra, at least in his comment to v. 24, has abandoned his normal focus on the straightforward sense of the text and begun prophesying falsehoods. See my comment to "Ham, the father of Canaan" (v. 22).

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **18 The sons of Noah . . . were Shem, Ham, and Japheth.** Since the Torah always lists them in this order, this must be the order of their birth—first Shem, after him Ham, and after him Japheth (Abarbanel). **Ham being the father of Canaan.** Already, having fathered him on the ark (Hizkuni).

NJPS Ham being the father of Canaan. [19]These three were the sons of Noah, and from these the whole world branched out.

[20]Noah, the tiller of the soil, was the first to plant a vineyard. [21]He drank of the wine and became drunk, and he uncovered

וְחָם וְיֶפֶת וְחָם הוּא אֲבִי כְנָעַן׃ 19 שְׁלֹשָׁה
אֵלֶּה בְּנֵי־נֹחַ וּמֵאֵלֶּה נָפְצָה כָּל־הָאָרֶץ׃
20 וַיָּחֶל נֹחַ אִישׁ הָאֲדָמָה וַיִּטַּע כָּרֶם׃
21 וַיֵּשְׁתְּ מִן־הַיַּיִן וַיִּשְׁכָּר וַיִּתְגַּל בְּתוֹךְ

OJPS Japheth; and Ham is the father of Canaan. [19]These three were the sons of Noah, and of these was the whole earth overspread.

[20]And Noah the husbandman began, and planted a vineyard. [21]And he drank of the wine, and was drunken; and he was

RASHI **20 Tiller of the soil.** More literally "husbandman" (OJPS). He was the owner of the land, as when Elimelech is called "Naomi's *man*" (Ruth 1:3). **Was the first.** "Was the first" can also be read as "acted profanely." He ought to have planted something else first. **To plant a vineyard.** When he went into the ark, he brought with him vine branches and fig shoots.

21 He uncovered himself. NJPS translates more literally here than OJPS. **His tent.** The suffix meaning "his" is spelled here, unusually, as ה rather than ו. The spelling alludes

KIMHI **19 From these the whole world branched out.** Eventually, after the generation of the Dispersion was scattered.

20 Noah, the tiller of the soil. See my comments to 5:29. **The first to plant a vineyard.** One that could produce grapes in large enough quantities to make wine. Up to this point, they had not drunk wine but had simply eaten grapes like any other fruit. The story is here for two reasons: (1) It explains why Canaan and his descendants were cursed, as we see in the stories of the Patriarchs. (Abraham, Isaac, and Rebekah all express disgust at the idea of their children marrying a Canaanite.) Ham was not originally evil—at first he was treated the same as his brothers—but later became so; and his son Canaan was worse. (2) It warns against the crazy behavior that results from indulgence in wine to the point where one's thoughts become confused. The book of Proverbs and the prophets as well condemn drinking, and there had to be a story of this kind in the Torah as well: the very first man to drink it got so drunk that he ended up exposing himself without realizing it.

21 He drank so much **of the wine** that he **became drunk** and made a fool of himself.

NAHMANIDES **20 The tiller of the soil.** Rashi's comment is wrong; in Ruth 1:3, Elimelech is simply being called "Naomi's husband," just as 7:2 here refers to the pairs of animals as "mates." The word literally means simply "a man," but some claim it can be used to express rulership and power, as when Judg. 7:14 calls Gideon "the *man* of Israel," or when David says to Abner, "You are a *man*, aren't you? And there is no one like you in Israel!" (1 Sam. 26:15); they find many more such examples. But I think the Midianite was simply calling Gideon an "Israelite," and Abner is being told—like the Philistines in 1 Sam. 4:9—to act like a man and not like a woman. When our verse calls Noah "a man of the soil" (which is what the Hebrew literally means), it is using the expression as in 19:4, "the men of the town." Noah was a man of the soil; he had not built a city or town to live in by which he could be identified. When 25:27 calls Esau "a man of the outdoors," it is because that is where he spent his time. The Mishnah regularly identifies various rabbis as "a man of" such-and-such a town. But perhaps we are being told that Noah decided to take on the task of cultivating the soil—planting and sowing—because he found the earth desolate. For one can also be called "a man of" something or someone to indicate the purpose to which one is dedicated, as "David's men" (in 1 Sam. 23:3 and elsewhere) refers to those who served him, and referring to someone as "the man of God" (e.g. Moses, in Deut. 33:1) means that he serves Him exclusively. See also Genesis Rabbah, which calls Noah "an ardent farmer." **Was the first to plant a vineyard.** Previously only individual vines had been planted. He was the first to plant many vines together, row after row. Wanting wine, he did not plant a vine as one plants other trees, but went ahead and made a vineyard.

21 He drank of the wine and became drunk, and he uncovered himself within his tent. This is a harsher warning about wine than the passage about the nazirites. **[J]** Even Noah—the righteous and blameless individual whose righteousness saved the entire world—was undone by wine. It caused him to sin, brought disgrace on him, and led to his offspring being cursed.

[J] See Numbers 6.

RASHBAM says, "Cursed be Canaan" (in v. 25), the text would have to interrupt Noah to explain who Canaan was.

IBN EZRA daughters of the Canaanites" (24:37). Rebekah, too, said to Isaac, "I am disgusted with my life because of the Hittite women" (27:46). Anyone who wonders what's wrong with the Hittites should open his eyes: the Hittites, the Amorites, and all the rest of them were descendants of Canaan, **[Q]** which is why the text refers in general to the land where these peoples lived as "the land of Canaan."

20 The tiller of the soil. The text literally calls him "a man of the soil," implying that he understood farming, which requires great technical knowledge. **The first to plant a vineyard.** Literally—the verb is geminate—he "began" (OJPS), which is why the midrash takes "he drank" immediately following to imply that he drank right away, on the very day that he planted the vineyard. But there is a hidden meaning to this phrase; it is not to be taken literally. In any case, remember phrases like "the woman conceived and bore a son," where both things obviously did not happen on the same day.

21 He uncovered himself. A Hitpael verb; note the apocopation of the ה. **His tent.** Note the use of ה for the 3rd masculine singular suffix instead of ו; compare "*its* boisterousness" (Exod. 32:17) and "Aaron had let *it* get out of control" (Exod. 32:25).

[Q] See 10:15–18.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **19 These three were the sons of Noah.** Ancient non-Jewish books claim that Noah fathered a fourth son called Yoniko, born after the three "who came out of the ark" (v. 18)—a great sage, astrologer, and prophet. But since the Torah says nothing about him, we have no reason to believe in him. Rather, Noah—the 10th generation from Adam—had three sons, just like Adam. In any case, the continents were assigned to these three: Asia to Shem, Africa to Ham, and Europe to Japheth. But they also represent three aspects of life: Ham, the physical; Japheth, the social; and Shem, the intellectual. The nations that descended from them followed those same patterns. Now you know why Noah had precisely three sons, no more and no less (Abarbanel).

20 Noah, the tiller of the soil. Literally, "the man" of the soil—he ruled the entire earth. But R. Yose b. R. Zadok, in the Tanhuma, points out: at first he was a "righteous," spiritual man (6:9), but now, in his old age, he reverted to being an "earthy" one (Abarbanel). **Was the first to plant a vineyard.** The vine branches that Rashi says he brought onto the ark were one of the kinds of food he prepared; elephants eat them (Hizkuni). He "began" (OJPS) with something he should not have, which led to further things that should not have been done. A small error at the beginning can eventually cause great harm (Sforno).

21 He drank of the wine. He had good reason never to want to see water again, let alone to drink it (Abarbanel). **He uncovered**

NJPS himself within his tent. [22]Ham, the father of Canaan, saw his father's nakedness and told his two brothers outside. [23]But Shem and Japheth took a cloth, placed it against both their backs and, walking backward, they covered their father's nakedness; their faces were turned the other way, so that they did not see their father's nakedness. [24]When Noah woke up from his wine and learned what his youngest son had done to him, [25]he said,

אהלה אָהֳלֹו׃ 22 וַיַּ֗רְא חָם֙ אֲבִ֣י כְנַ֔עַן אֶת־
עֶרְוַ֥ת אָבִ֖יו וַיַּגֶּד֙ לִשְׁנֵ֣י־אֶחָ֔יו בַּחֽוּץ׃
23 וַיִּקַּ֤ח׀ שֵׁם֙ וָיֶ֔פֶת אֶת־הַשִּׂמְלָ֖ה וַיָּשִׂ֣ימוּ
עַל־שְׁכֶ֑ם שְׁנֵיהֶ֗ם וַיֵּלְכ֤וּ אֲחֹרַנִּית֙ וַיְכַסּ֔וּ
אֶת עֶרְוַ֖ת אֲבִיהֶ֑ם וּפְנֵיהֶם֙ אֲחֹרַנִּ֔ית
וְעֶרְוַ֥ת אֲבִיהֶ֖ם לֹ֥א רָאֽוּ׃ 24 וַיִּ֣יקַץ נֹ֔חַ מִיֵּינ֑וֹ
וַיֵּ֣דַע אֵת֩ אֲשֶׁר־עָשָׂ֨ה־לֹ֜ו בְּנֹ֧ו הַקָּטֹֽן׃
25 וַיֹּ֖אמֶר

RASHI to "Oholah" of Ezek. 23:4, where we are told that "Oholah is Samaria"—a reference to the Ten Tribes, who were exiled on account of wine: "They drink [straight] from the wine bowls" (Amos 6:6).

22 Ham, the father of Canaan, saw. Some of the Sages say explicitly that "Canaan saw" and told his father. This would explain why he is mentioned here and why he is cursed. **His father's nakedness.** Some of the Sages say that he castrated him; others, that he raped him.

23 But Shem and Japheth took a cloth. The Hebrew verb is singular: "Shem took, and Japheth." The implication is that Shem played a greater role in this good deed than Japheth. That is why his descendants got the prayer shawl and the fringes, while Japheth's got the privilege of burial in the land of Israel: "On that day I will assign to Gog a burial site there in Israel" (Ezek. 39:11). **[L]** Meanwhile the descendants of Ham, who acted abhorrently toward his father, had this said of them: "So shall the king of Assyria drive off the captives of Egypt and the exiles of Nubia, young and old, naked and barefoot and with bared buttocks" (Isa. 20:4). **[M] Walking backward.** The Hebrew has already told us that they "went backward" (see OJPS); why repeat it? It emphasizes that when they got near him and had to turn their bodies toward him to cover him, they turned their faces away.

24 His youngest son. The Hebrew literally says, "his small son"—morally small: "I will make you *least* among nations, most despised among men" (Jer. 49:15).

[L] Gog "of the land of Magog" is "the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal" (Ezek. 38:2); and Magog, Tubal, and Meshech are sons of Japheth according to 10:2. **[M]** Egypt is Mizraim and Nubia is Cush, both sons of Ham according to 10:6.

OJPS uncovered within his tent. [22]And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brethren without. [23]And Shem and Japheth took a garment, and laid it upon both their shoulders, and went backward, and covered the nakedness of their father; and their faces were backward, and they saw not their father's nakedness. [24]And Noah awoke from his wine, and knew what his youngest son had done unto him. [25]And he said:

IBN EZRA 23 Against both their backs. Each took one end of the cloth and put it on one of his shoulders. The Hebrew literally says "on the shoulder of both of them," in the singular, because this Hebrew word cannot take the plural form. **Walking backward.** The opposite of ordinary walking, since motion implies moving forward.

24 When Noah woke up from his wine and learned what his youngest son had done to him. The text does not reveal what was done, but the one who did it was Canaan. Ham saw his father uncovered and did not cover him as the other brothers did, but he told them about it, and Canaan heard him tell them. We will simply never know what he did. And we should not make up things that might not even be true about such a great prophet. "His youngest son" here refers to Ham's youngest son, which Canaan indeed was, as we know from 10:6. That is why he cursed Canaan. The idea that Noah had to curse his grandson Canaan because God had blessed all three of his own sons is simply a midrash.

KIMHI 22 Ham, the father of Canaan, saw his father's nakedness and told his two brothers outside. He was a wicked man, the father of a wicked son, and committed two sins here: seeing his father's nakedness and making fun of it to his brothers.

24 Noah woke up from his wine. Drunkenness shuts off the senses in the same way that sleep does. **His youngest son.** If we say this refers to Ham, the literal meaning of the Hebrew (his "littlest" son) must refer to moral qualities. For Ham is nowhere listed as the youngest of the brothers. **Had done to him.** Telling the other brothers and not covering him up himself.

NAHMANIDES 22 Ham, the father of Canaan. In my view, Ham was Noah's youngest son, as I explained in my comment to "Shem, Ham, and Japheth" (6:10), and Canaan was Ham's eldest. (He is listed last in 10:6 because by then he has become, as v. 25 here curses him, "the lowest of slaves . . . to his brothers.") When this happened, Canaan was as yet Ham's only son. **Saw his father's nakedness.** His sin was that he did not treat his father respectfully. He should have covered up his nakedness and concealed his disgrace. **And told his two brothers outside.** He should not have told even them, but he went so far as to tell them "outside," in public, making fun of his father. Onkelos actually says that he told them "out in the street."

24 And learned what his youngest son had done to him. Ridiculing him in public and shaming him. And our Sages added a further sin. **[K]**

[K] See Rashi's comment to "His father's nakedness" of v. 22.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS himself. Rather, "he was uncovered" (OJPS)—it does not say by whom. Only the curse lets us know it was done by Canaan (Bekhor Shor). Rashi's point about the exile of the Ten Tribes is rereading *va-yitgal* ("he was uncovered") with a different meaning of the root: "he was exiled" (Hizkuni).

22 Ham, the father of Canaan, saw his father's nakedness and told his two brothers outside. This is the source of the rule given in Exod. 21:26–27 that a Canaanite slave is set free if his master destroys his eye—because Ham "saw"—or his tooth—because he "told" (Hizkuni). Canaan was a young boy, always at his father's side. It may have been he who uncovered Noah; Ham saw it, but Canaan told his two brothers. Canaan actually had three brothers, but only two of them were around at the time (Abarbanel).

23 Shem and Japheth took a cloth. Though Japheth was the oldest, Shem took the initiative here and earned the greater blessing (Bekhor Shor).

24 Noah woke up from his wine and learned what his youngest son had done to him. He learned how Shem had covered him (Bekhor Shor). He knew by prophecy what Ham's youngest son, Canaan, had done to him. The Torah does not say what it was, but obviously it was something depraved (Gersonides).

NJPS "Cursed be Canaan;
The lowest of slaves
Shall he be to his brothers."
[26]And he said,
"Blessed be the LORD,
The God of Shem;
Let Canaan be a slave to them.
[27]May God enlarge Japheth,
And let him dwell in the tents of Shem;
And let Canaan be a slave to them."

OJPS Cursed be Canaan;
A servant of servants
shall he be unto his brethren.
[26]And he said:
Blessed be the LORD,
the God of Shem;
And let Canaan be their servant.
[27]God enlarge Japheth,
And he shall dwell in the tents of Shem;
And let Canaan be their servant.

אָרֻ֣ור כְּנָ֔עַן
עֶ֥בֶד עֲבָדִ֖ים
יִהְיֶ֥ה לְאֶחָֽיו׃
26 וַיֹּ֕אמֶר
בָּר֖וּךְ יְהוָ֑ה
אֱלֹהֵ֖י שֵֽׁם
וִיהִ֥י כְנַ֖עַן עֶ֥בֶד לָֽמוֹ׃
27 יַפְתְּ֤ אֱלֹהִים֙ לְיֶ֣פֶת
וְיִשְׁכֹּ֖ן בְּאָהֳלֵ֣י שֵׁ֑ם
וִיהִ֥י כְנַ֖עַן עֶ֥בֶד לָֽמוֹ׃

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Since it was Ham who sinned against his father's honor in v. 22, why did Noah say, "Cursed be Canaan" (v. 25)? ✦ Once he has been cursed as "the lowest of slaves," why must both vv. 26 and 27 say, "Let Canaan be a slave to them"? Once would have been enough!

RASHI **25 Cursed be Canaan.** You, Ham, caused me not to be able to have a fourth son to serve me; let *your* fourth son **[N]** be cursed to serve the descendants of those older, greater brothers on whom the trouble of serving me has now been placed. — But why did Ham castrate him? He told his brothers, "Adam had two sons, and even they killed each other in a quarrel about who would inherit the world. Our father has three sons, and now he wants a fourth!"

26 Blessed be the LORD, the God of Shem. Who will one day fulfill His promise to Shem's descendants to give them the land of Canaan. **Let Canaan be a slave to them.** Let him do forced labor for them.

27 May God enlarge Japheth. "Enlarge" is *japhth*; it is a wordplay. **And let him dwell in the tents of Shem.** Rather, "But He shall dwell in the tents of Shem." The Holy One will cause His Shekhinah to rest on Israel. A midrash: Even though God would

[N] See 10:6.

IBN EZRA **25 Cursed be Canaan.** Saadia thinks this phrase is meant to be understood as "Cursed be Canaan's father." He bases this on Jer. 32:12, where the prophet calls Hanamel "my uncle," when just previously in Jer. 32:8 he has told us that Hanamel was his cousin. (In that case, possibly Hanamel was so much older than Jeremiah that the prophet sometimes called him "uncle.") But this "Canaan's father" is not that kind of thing. **The lowest of slaves.** Rather, "a slave of slaves" (compare OJPS), simply meaning "a slave among other slaves." If it meant that his owners were themselves slaves, it would have to say "a slave *to* slaves." Compare the expression "holy of holies," which means a holy place within a large area of holiness. **His brothers.** Cush, Mizraim, and Put. Some say that the Cushites too are slaves because Noah cursed Ham. But they have forgotten that the very first king who ruled after the Flood was from Cush. For "Cush also begot Nimrod" (10:8), and 10:10 refers to "his [Nimrod's] kingdom."

26 Blessed be the LORD, the God of Shem. We are obligated to offer thanks to the Lord, who is "the God of Shem." **Let Canaan be a slave.** The Lord will force Canaan to serve Him and Shem. **To them.** For the unusual form of the word, compare (e.g.) "You will bring *them*" of Exod. 15:17. Our word can either be spelled להם or למו but not just לם without either ה or ו.

27 May God enlarge Japheth. But not "the Lord," as with Shem. Saadia understands the pun here (see the Hebrew) to mean "May God do *well* by Japheth," but this was not well said. **And let him dwell in the tents of Shem.** Rather, "But let Him dwell in the tents of Shem." Both brothers

KIMHI **25 Cursed be Canaan.** God knew that Canaan's offspring would be evil and put these words prophetically in the mouth of Noah. Noah could not curse Ham; it would not be proper to curse someone God had blessed. Some of the Sages say it was actually Canaan who saw Noah (and told his father); others, that Canaan castrated him.

26 Blessed be the LORD, the God of Shem. Again, he saw prophetically that Shem would have unique descendants who would worship the God of the unique Name. That is why the Tetragrammaton is used with Shem's name, uniquely of all the brothers.

NAHMANIDES **25 Cursed be Canaan.** At this point (see my comment to v. 22) Ham had only the one son. When he sinned, Noah intended to curse his offspring. If he had cursed Ham without cursing Canaan and Ham had no more children, the curse would die with him and Noah would not get his revenge. How could he know what might happen? This way, even if Ham had another hundred children, at least he would have cursed his first-born and his first-born's descendants. **The lowest of slaves shall he be to his brothers.** All the rest of the human race. For in Hebrew one's "brother" may simply refer to one's fellow man. Anyone who finds Canaan can enslave him. Or "his brothers" could refer to his uncles Shem and Japheth, since "brother" sometimes refers to more distant relatives: "When Abram heard that his *brother* [really, his nephew] had been taken captive" (14:14). But some say it means his own brothers, since once he is enslaved to Shem and Japheth and to the other sons of Ham, he is literally enslaved to the entire world.

26 Blessed be the LORD, the God of Shem. Letting him know that Shem would serve God (and Canaan would serve him). **Let Canaan be a slave to them.** The plural "them" here could refer to Shem and all his descendants, or to "the brothers" of v. 25 (see my comment there). Ibn Ezra, who says that Canaan will be forced to serve the Lord, turns Noah's "curse" into a blessing—that Canaan will serve God. Both he and Rashi have their own explanations for why this phrase is repeated in v. 27.

27 May God enlarge Japheth, and let him dwell in the tents of Shem. Rather, "let Him"—God—"dwell in the tents of Shem." **And let Canaan be a slave to them.** To both Shem and Japheth. Canaan has thus been declared to be a slave to Shem twice, alluding to

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **25 Cursed be Canaan.** He is cursed in accordance with his name: he must be subservient (*cana*). His brothers will likewise be blessed in accordance with their names (Bekhor Shor).

26 Blessed be the LORD, the God of Shem. Canaan is subservient to all, Shem to none but the Holy One. And he is blessed by means of "the name LORD" (2 Sam. 6:2); "Shem" means "name" (Bekhor Shor). Noah foresaw that the land of Canaan would ultimately belong to the Israelites, descendants of Shem through Abraham (Abarbanel).

27 May God enlarge Japheth. "Enlarge" is *japhth*; he too was blessed in accordance with his name (Bekhor Shor). Noah foresaw that the land of Canaan would be conquered in turn by the Roman descendants of Japheth (Abarbanel).

NJPS [28]Noah lived after the Flood 350 years. [29]And all the days of Noah came to 950 years; then he died.

10 These are the lines of Shem, Ham, and Japheth, the sons of Noah: sons were born to them after the Flood.

[2]The descendants of Japheth: Gomer, Magog, Madai, Javan, Tubal, Meshech, and Tiras. [3]The descendants of Gomer: Ashkenaz, Riphath, and Togarmah. [4]The descendants of Javan: Elishah and Tarshish, the Kittim and the Dodanim. [5]From these the maritime nations branched out. [These

OJPS [28]And Noah lived after the flood three hundred and fifty years. [29]And all the days of Noah were nine hundred and fifty years; and he died.

10 Now these are the generations of the sons of Noah: Shem, Ham, and Japheth; and unto them were sons born after the flood.

[2]The sons of Japheth: Gomer, and Magog, and Madai, and Javan, and Tubal, and Meshech, and Tiras. [3]And the sons of Gomer: Ashkenaz, and Riphath, and Togarmah. [4]And the sons of Javan: Elishah, and Tarshish, Kittim, and Dodanim. [5]Of these were the isles of the

[28] וַיִּחְיֶ֣ה נֹ֔חַ אַחַ֖ר הַמַּבּ֑וּל שְׁלֹ֥שׁ מֵא֖וֹת שָׁנָ֥ה וַחֲמִשִּׁ֖ים שָׁנָֽה׃ [29] וַיִּֽהְיוּ֙* כָּל־יְמֵי־נֹ֔חַ תְּשַׁ֥ע מֵא֖וֹת שָׁנָ֣ה וַחֲמִשִּׁ֣ים שָׁנָ֑ה וַיָּמֹ֖ת׃ פ

ל

וְאֵ֗לֶּה תּוֹלְדֹת֙ בְּנֵ֣י נֹ֔חַ שֵׁ֥ם חָ֖ם וָיָֽפֶת׃ וַיִּוָּ֥לְדוּ לָהֶ֖ם בָּנִ֑ים אַחַ֖ר הַמַּבּֽוּל׃ [2] בְּנֵ֣י יֶ֔פֶת גֹּ֖מֶר וּמָג֣וֹג וּמָדַ֑י וְיָוָ֥ן וְתֻבַ֖ל וּמֶשֶׁ֥ךְ וְתִירָֽס׃ [3] וּבְנֵ֣י גֹ֔מֶר אַשְׁכְּנַ֖ז וְרִיפַ֣ת וְתוֹגַרְמָֽה׃ [4] וּבְנֵ֣י יָוָ֔ן אֱלִישָׁ֖ה וְתַרְשִׁ֑ישָׁה כִּתִּ֖ים וְדֹדָנִֽים׃ [5] מֵאֵ֗לֶּה נִפְרְד֛וּ אִיֵּ֥י הַגּוֹיִ֖ם

v. 29. בנוסח אשכנז "וַיִּהְי"

RASHI "beautify" Japheth **[O]** —for Cyrus, who was one of his descendants, built the Second Temple—the Shekhinah did not rest on it. And where did it rest? On the First Temple, built by Solomon, one of the descendants of Shem. **And let Canaan be a slave to them.** Even after the descendants of Shem were sent into exile, the descendants of Canaan would still be sold to them as slaves.

10:2 Tiras. This is Persia.

[O] Another possible meaning of *japhth*.

IBN EZRA are blessed here; in the previous verse, it is the Lord who is "blessed." **And let Canaan be a slave to them.** To Shem and Japheth as well as to his own brothers, and therefore to the entire world, for the world was populated through the spreading out of their descendants. All this, of course, happened only many years after the Flood.

10:2 The descendants of Japheth. Who has most recently been mentioned, at the end of v. 1.

4 The Kittim. This is not a group but a person (see OJPS). He was the son of Javan (see 1 Chron. 1:7). This is why I explained in my comment to Dan. 2:39 that Rome (Kittim) and Greece (Javan) are a single kingdom in that vision.

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Since v. 2 names seven sons of Japheth, why do vv. 3 and 4 name the descendants of only two of them?

KIMHI **10:1 Sons were born to them after the Flood.** Why specify that they were born "after the Flood"? We already know they had no sons *before* the Flood. — It is to let us know that they did not even father children while on board the ark, and to clarify that "your sons" of 8:15 is to be taken literally. It does not include grandchildren.

2 Gomer. Per Saadia, the ancestor of the Turks. **Meshech.** According to Joseph b. Gorion, **[D]** these are the Tuscans—the heads of Christianity today, since Rome falls within their territory.

3 Ashkenaz. Supposedly these are the Germans. **Riphath.** According to Saadia, the Franks. But note that in the parallel list in 1 Chron. 1:6 this is "Diphath."

4 The descendants of Javan. Judging from v. 2, we are being given only some of the descendants of Japheth. We do not know why not all of them are listed. **The Dodanim.** In 1 Chron. 1:7 this is "Rodanim." As we have explained in our comment there, it is easy to make a mistake in reading this word, since the written letters ד and ר so closely resemble each other. Moses wrote it with a *d* since the Holy Spirit came to him, but Ezra wrote it with an *r* to indicate that it is found written both ways. Some read it one way and some the other.

5 From these the maritime nations branched out. Not "the maritime nations," but "the zones of the nations in their lands"

[D] The name by which Josephus was mistakenly known to the medievals.

NAHMANIDES the fact that Shem will inherit the land of Canaan and all that is in it. For there is a legal principle that anything a slave acquires is really acquired by his master. The upshot of the story is that Canaan would be a slave forever and that Abraham, the heir of Shem, acquired the legal right to Canaan's land.

10:1 Sons were born to them after the Flood. Even though they might have been expected to have sons before the Flood (since in those generations they generally had their first child at the age of 60), they did not in fact have children even at the age of 100—not until after the Flood. The Holy One made them infertile so they would not have children just to see them perish (or to require many more people to be saved on the ark). This was true of the whole family. Note that Lamech (5:28) had Noah, his first child, at more than twice the age of most of his ancestors and Noah himself was far older when he had his first. This is all explained in the passage from Genesis Rabbah in Rashi's comment to 5:32.

2 The descendants of Japheth. The list begins with Japheth, the first-born, and continues with Ham, in order to end with Shem, whose genealogy will then be extended to Abraham.

5 From these the maritime nations branched out. For the descendants of Japheth lived on "the isles" (as OJPS more literally translates) of the sea, "divided" because each lived on a different island. Their lands were therefore distant from each other. This was how

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **29 And all the days of Noah came to 950 years.** Since he lived for 600 years before the Flood (7:6) and 350 years afterward (here, v. 28) we see that the year during which the Flood itself occurred is simply not counted (Hizkuni). If you count up, you will see that Moses, who wrote the Torah, knew his grandfather Kohath, who knew his own grandfather Jacob, who knew Abraham, who knew Noah, who knew Lamech, who knew Adam; so the story of creation was still quite fresh in his day (Abarbanel). **Then he died.** Before the next episode of the story, Abraham's awakening to the Lord (Sforno).

10:2 The descendants of Japheth: Gomer. He ultimately gave his name to Galicia, in farthest Spain. Indeed, I could give you the Latin names of the nations that came from all the names in this chapter if I were not afraid of going on too long—and there would in any case not be much point to it (Abarbanel).

NJPS are the descendants of Japheth] by their lands—each with its language—their clans and their nations.

6The descendants of Ham: Cush, Mizraim, Put, and Canaan. 7The descendants of Cush: Seba, Havilah, Sabtah, Raamah, and Sabteca. The descendants of Raamah: Sheba and Dedan.

8Cush also begot Nimrod, who was the first man of might on earth. 9He was a mighty hunter by the grace of the LORD;

בְּאַרְצֹתָם אִישׁ לִלְשֹׁנוֹ לְמִשְׁפְּחֹתָם בְּגוֹיֵהֶם׃

6 וּבְנֵי חָם כּוּשׁ וּמִצְרַיִם וּפוּט וּכְנָעַן׃ 7 וּבְנֵי כוּשׁ סְבָא וַחֲוִילָה וְסַבְתָּה וְרַעְמָה וְסַבְתְּכָא וּבְנֵי רַעְמָה שְׁבָא וּדְדָן׃ 8 וְכוּשׁ יָלַד אֶת־נִמְרֹד הוּא הֵחֵל לִהְיוֹת גִּבֹּר בָּאָרֶץ׃ 9 הוּא־הָיָה גִבֹּר־צַיִד לִפְנֵי

OJPS nations divided in their lands, every one after his tongue, after their families, in their nations.

6And the sons of Ham: Cush, and Mizraim, and Put, and Canaan. 7And the sons of Cush: Seba, and Havilah, and Sabtah, and Raamah, and Sabteca; and the sons of Raamah: Sheba, and Dedan.

8And Cush begot Nimrod; he began to be a mighty one in the earth. 9He was a mighty hunter before the LORD; wherefore

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Similarly, in vv. 6–20, Ham has four sons but only the nations that descended from three of them are named. (Lest you think that Put was barren, be aware that Ezek. 27:10 and other verses refer to Put as a nation.) ✦ Why does the text tell us where all these nations established themselves except for Mizraim?

RASHI **8 Nimrod, who was the first man of might.** Causing the entire world to revolt against the Holy One, as an adviser to the generation of the Dispersion. **[P]**

9 A mighty hunter. A trapper, who trapped people's minds with his words and

[P] The M-R-D of Nimrod's name suggests the Hebrew root that means "to rebel." The generation of the Dispersion is that of the Tower of Babel; see ch. 11.

RASHBAM **10:9 He was a mighty hunter by the grace of the LORD.** More

IBN EZRA **8 Nimrod.** You should not expect an explanation for each and every name, if none is written explicitly in the text. **Who was the first man of might on earth.** The first to demonstrate the use of human might against the animals, being "a mighty hunter" (v. 9).

9 Hence the saying. This was a saying even in Moses' time. **A mighty hunter by the grace of the LORD.** Rather, "before the

KIMHI (compare OJPS). Once the descendants of Japheth "divided" (see again OJPS), they chose various regions to dwell in. **Each with its language.** For after the Dispersion described in ch. 11, each nation of the 70 had its own language, despite (in this group) their all being descendants of Japheth.

6 The descendants of Ham. He is listed after Japheth. Even though Japheth is listed last of the brothers and thus presumably the youngest, he outranked them all. And if Japheth really was the oldest, he certainly deserved to be first here. (Shem is listed last in the genealogy because this book is about the Patriarchs, who were his descendants.)

7 Dedan. According to Saadia, these are the inhabitants of India.

8 Cush also begot Nimrod. He receives individual mention as a result of his might and his majesty. **Who was the first man of might on earth.** More literally, "he began to be a mighty one in the earth" (OJPS). It does *not* mean that there had never been a man of might before him nor even in his own time. That is simply impossible. After all, "the Nephilim appeared on earth" (6:4) long before him. The verb means "to begin," not "to be first." Nimrod began to display his might by conquering one or more nations and making himself their king. Before him, no one man had ruled over an entire people. (This is why our verse says "on earth.") Previously, every nation had been governed by judges and similar leaders. Again, all this took place only after the Dispersion.

9 He was a mighty hunter. He exerted his might and his mastery of strategy against the animals as well. **Hence the saying, "Like**

NAHMANIDES God "enlarged" Japheth (9:27). He had many descendants spread far afield. But the descendants of Ham all lived in neighboring lands (see v. 19); they lived "in their lands, in their nations" (as OJPS translates the end of v. 20) and so did the descendants of Shem (see v. 31). The goal of this whole genealogy was to connect Abraham to Shem and to list the nations descended from Ham, whose land (through their ancestor's sin) would be acquired by Abraham. So Japheth's descendants are listed as well. The story of the Dispersion is here partly to explain the existence of so many languages and peoples scattered to the ends of the earth within such a short period of time after Adam; and partly to make known the Holy One's loyalty in keeping the covenant with Noah not to destroy them. As Maimonides explains (quite correctly) in the *Guide*, it also serves to confirm the truth of the story of creation. For Abraham would "instruct his children and his posterity" (18:19), testifying in a direct line to the Flood witnessed by Noah and his sons, whom he knew personally. Now Noah himself was a thirdhand witness to creation itself, having heard about it from his father, who heard about it directly from Adam. Both Isaac and Jacob knew Shem, who directly witnessed the Flood. Jacob told all this to those who went down to Egypt and (in fact) to Pharaoh and all the others of that generation. In those years, people knew their great-grandparents and even their great-great-grandparents, who told them everything they had done and who was related to whom.

6 The descendants of Ham: Cush, Mizraim, Put, and Canaan. The others gave rise to multiple nations, which will be listed below. But Put gave rise to just a single nation and is therefore not part of the expanded list. Resh Lakish says in Genesis Rabbah, "We might have thought that the clan of Put was swallowed up by the others had Ezekiel not mentioned him: 'Nubia, Put, and Lud, and all the mixed populations' [Ezek. 30:5]." That is, we might have thought they were absorbed into the population of Canaan without having a distinct land of their own named after them. But we are also not told about the descendants of "Magog, Madai, Javan, Tubal, Meshech, and Tiras" (v. 2), the sons of Japheth, as we are for their elder brother Gomer. The same is true for "the descendants of Shem: Elam, Asshur, Arpachshad, Lud, and Aram" (v. 22); only Aram's descendants are listed. All these others founded single nations rather than a multitude of peoples.

8 Cush also begot Nimrod. The "descendants of Cush" and "the descendants of Raamah" (v. 7) were different peoples, named after their founders. But "Nimrod" is not a people but an individual, which is why he is "also" listed here, separately from the others. **Who was the first man of might on earth.** That is, if Rashi's comment is correct, the first one *after* the Flood. For that sort of rebellion had already started in the generation of Enosh. Or perhaps the point is that in the time of Enosh they were not openly rebellious; they simply served other gods as well as the Holy One.

9 He was a mighty hunter. Rashi's is the traditional view; Ibn Ezra, following the straightforward sense of the text, explains it more or less exactly the opposite way. But his explanation does not seem right; he is exculpating a guilty man. It was a received tradition

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **8 The first man of might on earth.** That is, "the first to seek power" (Gersonides).

9 A mighty hunter. When the people saw how frightened the animals were of him, they became frightened of him as well

NJPS hence the saying, "Like Nimrod a mighty hunter by the grace of the LORD." [10]The mainstays of his kingdom were Babylon, Erech, Accad, and Calneh in the land of Shinar. [11]From that land Asshur went forth and built Nineveh, Rehoboth-ir, Calah, [12]and Resen between Nineveh and Calah, that is the great city.

יְהוָה עַל־כֵּן יֵאָמֵר כְּנִמְרֹד גִּבּוֹר צַיִד לִפְנֵי
יְהוָה׃ [10] וַתְּהִי רֵאשִׁית מַמְלַכְתּוֹ בָּבֶל
וְאֶרֶךְ וְאַכַּד וְכַלְנֵה בְּאֶרֶץ שִׁנְעָר׃ [11] מִן־
הָאָרֶץ הַהִוא יָצָא אַשּׁוּר וַיִּבֶן אֶת־נִינְוֵה
וְאֶת־רְחֹבֹת עִיר וְאֶת־כָּלַח׃ [12] וְאֶת־רֶסֶן
בֵּין נִינְוֵה וּבֵין כָּלַח הִוא הָעִיר הַגְּדֹלָה׃

OJPS it is said: "Like Nimrod a mighty hunter before the LORD." [10]And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel, and Erech, and Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar. [11]Out of that land went forth Asshur, and builded Nineveh, and Rehoboth-ir, and Calah, [12]and Resen between Nineveh and Calah—the same is the great city.

RASHI deceived them into rebelling against the Holy One. **By the grace of the LORD.** Rather, "before the LORD" (OJPS)—to His face. His intent was to denigrate Him. **Hence the saying, "Like Nimrod."** When anyone is so wicked and brazen that he knows his master but deliberately rebels against him, people say of him, "Like Nimrod—a mighty hunter!"

10 The land of Shinar. Babylonia, so named because all the dead of the Flood were washed down there (*ninar*) when the waters drained away.

11 From that land Asshur went forth. When he saw that his sons were listening to Nimrod and rebelling against the Holy One by building the tower, he got out of there.

12 That is the great city. Nineveh is: "Nineveh was an enormously large city a three days' walk across" (Jon. 3:3).

RASHBAM literally, "before the LORD" (OJPS), that is, he was the mightiest hunter in the world. Similarly "Nineveh was an enormously large city" (Jon. 3:3) is literally "a great city to God." In all of God's world there was no greater city. **[D]**

[D] See Rashbam's comment to 27:7.

IBN EZRA LORD" (OJPS). He would build altars and put the animals on them as an offering before the Lord. That is the straightforward sense of the expression; the midrash goes in its own direction.

11 From that land Asshur went forth. He was a descendant of Japheth, **[R]** but that was after the Dispersion; the king who first ruled Babylon was not Asshur but Nimrod. **[S]** According to Seder Olam, Nimrod was king over all 70 nations; and the Dispersion, after the attempt to build the tower, took place in his time. **[T]**

12 That is the great city. To me, the most plausible explanation is that this phrase refers to Nineveh, which "Asshur went forth and built" in v. 11. But it is not impossible that it refers to Resen or to Calah.

[R] Since v. 22 calls him a descendant of Shem, it is not clear why Ibn Ezra makes this statement. In the later commentary, he says, "We do not know from whom Asshur was descended, but perhaps he was a descendant of Ham, since that is the context here." **[S]** "Asshur" and "Assyria" (the later rival kingdom to Babylonia) are the same word in Hebrew. **[T]** Our version of Seder Olam does not say this.

KIMHI **Nimrod a mighty hunter."** People were so amazed at his prowess that he became proverbial. Whenever people saw someone who could overcome wild animals, then or later, they would say, "He's a real Nimrod!" **By the grace of the LORD.** Attaching the word "God" or God's name to something is used in Hebrew to indicate the superlative: "Nineveh was an *enormously* large city" (Jon. 3:3); "Your beneficence is like the *high* mountains" (Ps. 36:7); "a *blazing* flame" (Song 8:6). Some say he would offer the animals he killed "before the Lord" (as the Hebrew literally says; see OJPS). But Onkelos understood it as I do.

10 The mainstays of his kingdom were Babylon, Erech, Accad, and Calneh in the land of Shinar. Rather, Babylon was "the beginning of his kingdom" (OJPS), after which he conquered the others. But all four countries were "in the land of Shinar." But it is possible to read the verse to say that all four were his first conquest, which would mean that his later conquests are not listed.

11 From that land. Shinar. **Asshur went forth.** It does not say who he was—perhaps one of the descendants of Ham (about whom we are reading) or perhaps of Shem, as v. 22 says. It may be that once he grew up he moved to Shinar and settled there, eventually conquering it from Nimrod or one of Nimrod's sons. Certainly "went forth" implies that the one who took his kingdom had "come forth" from another country. The country was eventually called "Assyria" after Asshur (though possibly it was first just the name of a city he built). We find that the king of Assyria ruled Babylon and all that region. But eventually the Hamites were expelled and the country taken over by the Chaldeans, who were descendants of Shem. This entire story is meant to tell us that the world and all that is in it belong to the Lord: "It is I who made the earth . . . I give it to whomever I deem proper" (Jer. 27:5)—based on their behavior, for He is "a faithful God, never false" (Deut. 32:4).

12 And Resen between Nineveh and Calah, that is the great city. Most commentators think Nineveh is "the great city," based on Jon. 3:3. But in fact it is Resen. Note that even though the king of Assyria conquered all these countries and built great cities, eventually

NAHMANIDES among our Sages that Nimrod was evil. In my view, Nimrod was the first to exercise his might to rule over others. Up to his time there were no wars and no kings, but he exerted his power over the Babylonians until he managed to become their king. As v. 10 tells us (despite NJPS), Babylon, Erech, Accad, and Calneh were only "the beginning" (OJPS) of his kingdom. After that, he turned his attention to Asshur; "he did as he pleased and grew great" (Dan. 8:4). There he built fortified cities through "mighty and powerful acts" (Esther 10:2). But he was indeed a "mighty hunter" of animals as well. **By the grace of the LORD.** Rather, "before the LORD" (OJPS), that is, anywhere on earth. Compare "the earth became corrupt *before God*" (6:11) and "that person shall be cut off from *before Me*" (Lev. 22:3). Anywhere one is on earth one is "before Him."

11 From that land Asshur went forth. Rather, "from that land [Babylonia]"—having established his rule over it—"he [Nimrod] went forth to Asshur [i.e., Assyria]." Asshur was one of the sons of Shem (see v. 22), not of Ham. For the verb "go forth" followed by a destination without a preposition, see Num. 34:4 and Deut. 3:1, and with other verbs Dan. 11:28 and many other occurrences. This is why Assyria is also called "the land of Nimrod": "Who will shepherd Assyria's land with swords, the land of Nimrod in its gates" (Mic. 5:5), where "its gates"—that is, its cities—are **Nineveh, Rehoboth-ir, Calah** of our verse.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS (Abarbanel). **By the grace of the LORD.** Rather, "before the LORD" (OJPS)—as the result of a decree issued "before the LORD" (Hizkuni). Some say he made offerings "before the LORD" to trick people into thinking he was a God-fearing man (Abarbanel). **Hence the saying, "Like Nimrod a mighty hunter by the grace of the LORD."** The "saying" is used when a man arms one of his retainers, to bless him with military success "like Nimrod" (Hizkuni).

12 Resen between Nineveh and Calah. Rather, "a bridle between Nineveh and Calah" (see, e.g., Ps. 32:9). The two cities were bridged by building between them until they grew into a single enormous city (see Jon. 3:3) which kept the name Nineveh (Bekhor Shor).

NJPS 13And Mizraim begot the Ludim, the Anamim, the Lehabim, the Naphtuhim, 14the Pathrusim, the Casluhim, and the Caphtorim, whence the Philistines came forth.

15Canaan begot Sidon, his first-born,

OJPS 13And Mizraim begot Ludim, and Anamim, and Lehabim, and Naphtuhim, 14and Pathrusim, and Casluhim—whence went forth the Philistines—and Caphtorim.

15And Canaan begot Zidon his firstborn,

13 וּמִצְרַ֗יִם יָלַ֛ד אֶת־לוּדִ֥ים וְאֶת־עֲנָמִ֖ים
וְאֶת־לְהָבִ֑ים וְאֶת־נַפְתֻּחִֽים׃ 14 וְאֶת־
פַּתְרֻסִּ֣ים וְאֶת־כַּסְלֻחִ֗ים אֲשֶׁ֤ר יָצְאוּ֙ מִשָּׁ֔ם
פְּלִשְׁתִּ֖ים וְאֶת־כַּפְתֹרִֽים׃ ס
15 וּכְנַ֗עַן יָלַ֛ד אֶת־צִידֹ֥ן בְּכֹר֖וֹ וְאֶת־

RASHI **13 The Lehabim.** Whose faces resembled *lahab*, a "flame."

14 The Pathrusim, the Casluhim . . . whence the Philistines came forth. The Philistines came from both of these nations, who used to swap their wives. (The Caphtorim come at the end of the verse in the Hebrew, after this sentence; see OJPS.)

RASHBAM **15 Canaan begot Sidon.** Note that Put of v. 6 has been omitted. He and all his descendants made up just one of the 70 nations. V. 32 would not have been accurate if his descendants were listed in this section; it would have sounded as if there were more than 70. Put and his descendants were a single nation, speaking a single language. **[E]**

[E] This comment comes from a discussion between Joseph Kara and Rashbam reported in MS Munich 252.

KIMHI the kings of Babylonia (Merodach-baladan, son of Baladan; Nebuchadnezzar; and so on) took over from them. Afterward, the kings of Persia took over, and so on from king to king, both there and in all the rest of the countries forever, to make it known that "the earth is the LORD's" (Ps. 24:1).

13 Mizraim. We do not know why Ham gave this son a plural-sounding name of the kind we have not otherwise seen except for Kittim and Dodanim, the sons of Javan (see v. 4 as correctly translated by OJPS). It may have commemorated something that happened at the time of his birth, for originally all human names were of this kind. **The Ludim, the Anamim, the Lehabim, the Naphtuhim.** And so forth. Again, see OJPS. These are the names of individuals. Mizraim gave his sons the same kind of name he himself had. It was a known thing among them. But a midrash suggests reading *im* as *yam*—"sea," where the Egyptians would drown.

14 The Pathrusim, the Casluhim, and the Caphtorim, whence the Philistines came forth. Again, see OJPS for the correct translation. It is not clear whether the Philistines came from just Casluhim or from both Pathrusim and Casluhim, their children having intermarried. Note that the Hebrew says the Philistines came "from there," but "there" can indeed refer to a person and not just a place: "There, the Shepherd, the Rock of Israel" (49:24).

15 Canaan. The text does not bother to tell us about the descendants of Put, who were not necessary for the story. **Sidon, his first-born.** I can see no reason why Sidon is identified as "his first-born," as none of the others are. Ordinarily we presume the first son listed was the first-born (though sometimes the most important one is given priority, as

IBN EZRA **13 And Mizraim begot.** Literally, "gave birth to," reflecting the fact that the son is the result of the man's vigor and his strength, in his image and after his likeness. **The Ludim.** "The" is not in any of these names in the Hebrew; see OJPS. But I believe it is correct to say that these are all names of nations, one clan per nation. That is why they all end with the *-im* plural.

14 The Pathrusim. This name proves the assertion I made in the previous comment. **[U] The Caphtorim, whence the Philistines came forth.** "Whence" proves conclusively that these are place names, not the names of individuals. Note that despite the complicated Hebrew word order (see OJPS) the Caphtorim too were descended from Mizraim.

[U] This name is found elsewhere without *-im*, suggesting that the form with *-im* is indeed a plural.

NAHMANIDES **13 And Mizraim begot.** Mizraim's descendants are described as peoples rather than by the locations where they settled as the others were (e.g., the "isles" of v. 5 and "the land of Shinar" in v. 10; the territories of Canaan in vv. 19–20 and of Shem in v. 30). But that is because everyone knew where Mizraim lived: in Egypt, which in Hebrew bears the same name as he. And all his descendants lived in the same vicinity, and their lands bore the same names, e.g., for "the Pathrusim" of v. 14, "the land of Pathros" (Jer. 44:1 and Ezek. 29:14), which is part of the land of Egypt: "I will restore the fortunes of the Egyptians and bring them back to the land of their origin, the land of Pathros" (Ezek. 29:14). **The Ludim.** Lud too was in the vicinity of Egypt; see Ezek. 30:5. Similarly, the Philistines (v. 14) are the inhabitants of Philistia. See further Ibn Ezra's comment.

14 Whence the Philistines came forth. The commentators take this to mean "from whom" they came forth, as in "Kings shall *issue* from your loins" (35:11); see Rashi's comment (taken from Genesis Rabbah). But I think the Caphtorim "came" from a city by that name, in the land of Caphtor (Crete). The Casluhim were a subset of the Caphtorim who emigrated from there to find a more secure land of their own. They left Caphtor to their relatives, conquered a land called Philistia, and were called Philistines from that time forth. This is how Deuteronomy explains it: "So, too, with the Avvim who dwelt in villages in the vicinity of Gaza: the Caphtorim, who came from Crete, wiped them out and settled in their place" (Deut. 2:23). These particular Caphtorim were the Casluhim.

15 Canaan begot Sidon, his first-born. The 10 nations listed in vv. 15–18 are the 10 that were given to Abraham. Remember that all the descendants of Canaan were sold into perpetual slavery. But the names of most of them were different by the time of Abraham. Here they have the names given them by their father; after they moved to the different lands and settled there, they acquired different names, perhaps from what those lands were already called (see my comment to v. 14). Or else the Arkites and the Sinites must have begotten nations in their own right and then been cut off from them, so that the nations were named instead after their sons (say, the Kenites and the Kenizzites of 15:19). The same thing happened among the Israelites. **[L]** In Genesis 15, when the land was given to Abraham, they were called by the names they bore at that time. The Hivites, who are listed here in v. 17 but not in Genesis 15, were certainly part of the gift to Abraham, since they *are* listed in Deut. 7:1 and elsewhere. Canaan is the name of one of the 10 nations because one of the 10 sons was of so little account that he did not make a name for himself; his descendants merged with those of another brother and both took their father's name: "Canaanites." Or perhaps it was Sidon, the first-born, who gave rise to "the Canaanites" in place of one of his brothers who did not become a nation at all. You might think from v. 14 that Philistia belonged to Egypt and not to Canaan, but we are told that all the districts "from the Shihor, which is close to Egypt, to the territory of Ekron on the north, are accounted Canaanite, namely, those of the five lords of the Philistines" (Josh. 13:3), who had conquered part of Canaan and settled there. We see from "What is

[L] See Nahmanides' comment to Num. 26:13.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **15 Canaan begot Sidon, his first-born, and Heth.** And eventually a total of 11 sons (Bekhor Shor).

NJPS and Heth; [16]and the Jebusites, the Amorites, the Girgashites, [17]the Hivites, the Arkites, the Sinites, [18]the Arvadites, the Zemarites, and the Hamathites. Afterward the clans of the Canaanites spread out. ([19]The [original] Canaanite territory extended from Sidon as far as Gerar, near Gaza, and as far as Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboiim, near Lasha.) [20]These are the descendants of Ham, according to their clans and languages, by their lands and nations.

[21]Sons were also born to Shem, ancestor

OJPS and Heth; [16]and the Jebusite, and the Amorite, and the Girgashite; [17]and the Hivite, and the Arkite, and the Sinite; [18]and the Arvadite, and the Zemarite, and the Hamathite; and afterward were the families of the Canaanite spread abroad. [19]And the border of the Canaanite was from Zidon, as thou goest toward Gerar, unto Gaza; as thou goest toward Sodom and Gomorrah and Admah and Zeboiim, unto Lasha. [20]These are the sons of Ham, after their families, after their tongues, in their lands, in their nations.

[21]And unto Shem, the father of all the

חֵֽת׃ 16 וְאֶת־הַיְבוּסִ֖י וְאֶת־הָאֱמֹרִ֑י וְאֶת־
הַגִּרְגָּשִֽׁי׃ 17 וְאֶת־הַחִוִּ֖י וְאֶת־הַעַרְקִ֑י וְאֶת־
הַסִּינִֽי׃ 18 וְאֶת־הָאַרְוָדִ֖י וְאֶת־הַצְּמָרִ֑י
וְאֶת־הַחֲמָתִ֖י וְאַחַ֣ר נָפֹ֔צוּ מִשְׁפְּחֹ֖ות
הַֽכְּנַעֲנִֽי׃ 19 וַיְהִ֛י גְּבֻ֥ול הַֽכְּנַעֲנִ֖י מִצִּידֹ֑ן
בֹּאֲכָ֣ה גְרָרָ֔ה עַד־עַזָּ֖ה בֹּאֲכָ֣ה סְדֹ֔מָה
וַעֲמֹרָ֥ה וְאַדְמָ֖ה וּצְבֹיִ֑ם עַד־לָֽשַׁע׃ 20 אֵ֚לֶּה
בְּנֵי־חָ֔ם לְמִשְׁפְּחֹתָ֖ם לִלְשֹׁנֹתָ֑ם בְּאַרְצֹתָ֖ם
בְּגֹויֵהֶֽם׃ ס
21 וּלְשֵׁ֗ם יֻלַּ֛ד גַּם־ה֥וּא אֲבִֽי כָל־בְּנֵי־עֵ֖בֶר

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why must v. 21 tell us that Shem was "ancestor of all the descendants of Eber" when v. 24 will make this obvious?

RASHI **18 Afterward the clans of the Canaanites spread out.** Many other clans emerged from these.

19 The [original] Canaanite territory. Rather, "the border," as this Hebrew word means throughout the Bible. **As far as.** Despite the translations (contrast "as thou goest" of NJPS), this is a noun, "your coming" or "your going." It seems colloquial to me, like telling a friend, "The border extends until you get to" such-and-such a place.

20 According to their clans and languages, by their lands and nations. Despite being divided by their various languages and their various lands, all of them were "descendants of Ham."

21 Ancestor of all the descendants of Eber. Rather, of all those who live *eber hanahar,* "beyond the river." **Older brother of Japheth.** In Hebrew, it is not clear whether the adjective "older" belongs to Shem or to Japheth. But 11:10, "Shem was 100 years old when he begot Arpachshad, two years after the

IBN EZRA **20 These are the descendants of Ham, according to their clans and languages.** It said the same of Japheth (in v. 5) and will say the same of Shem (in v. 31).

21 Ancestor of all the descendants of Eber. Who was the first father of the Hebrews; no one ranked higher than he, and the Lord was his God: "Thus says the LORD, the God of the Hebrews" (Exod. 9:1,13; 10:3). Whereas Canaan, whose father was Ham, **[V]**—none ranked lower than he. And

[V] Our texts have "Canaan, the father of Ham," but this must be a mistake.

KIMHI with Shem, Ham, and Japheth, according to the commentator who understands Japheth to be the oldest). Possibly Sidon is called "first-born" to indicate that his being listed first was for both these reasons, as with "the first-born of Ishmael, Nebaioth" (1 Chron. 1:29), who was clearly also personally important, since Basemath is identified in 36:3 not only as "daughter of Ishmael" but also as "sister of Nebaioth."

16 The Jebusites, the Amorites, the Girgashites. And so forth. All these are given in adjectival form and are the gentilic names by which the clans descending from these individuals would be known. They do therefore also include the definite article "the," which is not used in personal names. The names of these individuals are not given in personal form. Note that vv. 15–18 identify 10 Canaanite clans. (Sidon is not one of them; as v. 19 tells us, Canaanite territory extends *from* Sidon southward.) When God gives Abraham the land of Canaan in 15:18–21, there are also 10 Canaanite clans named. We see that not all of them are mentioned in either place, and that some are identified by two different names, a common biblical phenomenon. Note further that "Canaanite" is both the name of one of the clans and a general name for all of them.

18 Afterward. After the Dispersion. **The clans of the Canaanites spread out.** Rather, they "dispersed" from their original location, in the east with all the other clans, to the land that was afterward called "the land of Canaan."

19 The Canaanite territory. It is only partially described here; the full description will come when the land is allocated to the tribes of Israel. **[E]** God wanted the Canaanites to dwell in the land so that the Israelites would not have to develop it from scratch when they came, so that it would have "houses full of all good things that you did not fill, hewn cisterns that you did not hew, vineyards and olive groves that you did not plant" (Deut. 6:11).

21 Sons were also born to Shem. His descendants are listed last because they are to lead, generation by generation, to Abraham and the story of the Patriarchs. "Also" implies, "Don't think because he was not listed first—as he has been up to now—that he did not

[E] See Joshua 14–17.

NAHMANIDES this you are doing to Me, O Tyre, Sidon, and all the districts of Philistia?" (Joel 4:4) that Philistia apparently extended all this way north; but perhaps not all of Philistia was given to Israel. But all of Canaan certainly was (see Deut. 32:8). **[M]** At the time of the Dispersion, though, the Holy One gave these lands to Canaan, to take care of it for Israel. It is like a man who gives the property of his minor son to a slave to take care of it for him until the son comes of age and takes possession of the property and of the slave as well. I will have more to say about this later, God willing. **[N]**

21 Sons were also born to Shem. "Also" because we might have thought he did not have any, since the sons of both his younger brothers have already been given. **Ancestor of all the descendants of Eber.** Rather, "of the inhabitants of Eber [ha-Nahar]"—"across the river," the lands east of the Euphrates, the region Abraham came from. It cannot possibly refer to Eber of vv. 24–25. Why would Shem

[M] See Rashi's and Ibn Ezra's comments to that verse. **[N]** See Nahmanides' comment to Deut. 2:23.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **18 Afterward the clans of the Canaanites spread out.** Rather, *one* of them split into two, making a total of 12; this explains how the Holy One "fixed the boundaries of peoples in relation to Israel's numbers" (Deut. 32:8)—12 Israelite tribes occupying the territory of the 12 Canaanite tribes. The latter number is just 7 in Deut. 7:1 because only the 6 most important are listed; the other 6 are lumped together as "Canaanites" (Bekhor Shor).

21 Sons were also born to Shem. Sons who were "also" like him in worth: Eber (Sforno). **The descendants of Eber.** That is, the

NJPS of all the descendants of Eber and older brother of Japheth. 22The descendants of Shem: Elam, Asshur, Arpachshad, Lud, and Aram. 23The descendants of Aram: Uz, Hul, Gether, and Mash. 24Arpachshad begot Shelah, and Shelah begot Eber. 25Two sons were born to Eber: the name of the first was Peleg, for in his days

אֲחִי יֶפֶת הַגָּדוֹל׃ 22 בְּנֵי שֵׁם עֵילָם וְאַשּׁוּר
וְאַרְפַּכְשַׁד וְלוּד וַאֲרָם׃ 23 וּבְנֵי אֲרָם עוּץ
וְחוּל וְגֶתֶר וָמָשׁ׃ 24 וְאַרְפַּכְשַׁד יָלַד אֶת־
שֶׁלַח וְשֶׁלַח יָלַד אֶת־עֵבֶר׃ 25 וּלְעֵבֶר יֻלַּד
שְׁנֵי בָנִים שֵׁם הָאֶחָד פֶּלֶג כִּי בְיָמָיו נִפְלְגָה

OJPS children of Eber, the elder brother of Japheth, to him also were children born. 22The sons of Shem: Elam, and Asshur, and Arpachshad, and Lud, and Aram. 23And the sons of Aram: Uz, and Hul, and Gether, and Mash. 24And Arpachshad begot Shelah; and Shelah begot Eber. 25And unto Eber were born two sons; the name of the one was Peleg; for in his days was

RASHI Flood," implies that Japheth was the older. Noah was 500 when he had his first child (see 5:32) and the Flood came when he was 600 (7:6). So his eldest son must have been 100, an age that Shem did not reach until "two years after the Flood." Our verse does not even mention that Shem was Ham's brother too. Shem and Japheth honored their father, while the other degraded him.

25 Peleg, for in his days the earth was divided. The languages were confounded and the people were scattered from the valley, divided and dispersed (*nitpalgu*) all over the world. We learn that Eber was a prophet, since he gave his son a name based on what would happen in the future (for we see in

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why is he identified as "brother of Japheth" and not of Ham? Japheth is not identified as "brother of Shem"! ✦ V. 22 tells us the names of Shem's five "sons" (see OJPS), but the text continues with the descendants only of Aram (number five) and Arpachshad (number three). Why? Both Elam and Lud are mentioned elsewhere in the Bible, and Asshur, of course, is extremely well known.

IBN EZRA it is not right to mix the sacred and the profane. **Older brother of Japheth.** But it is all right to mention Shem and Japheth, a good man, together. Note that the text mentions Shem first, though he was younger, and "the older brother, Japheth" (as the text really says) second, out of respect for Shem. This must be so, since Noah began to beget children when he "had lived 500 years" (5:32). There is no room for argument here, since "Noah was six hundred years old when the Flood came" (7:6). If Shem was the eldest, he would have had to be 101 when they came out of the ark, but "Shem was 100 years old when he begot Arpachshad, two years after the Flood" (11:10). But some explain the Hebrew of our phrase as the translations take it—that Shem was the eldest. This would explain why his name is listed first (see v. 1 and throughout the story). According to this view, when Shem was born, just a bit of Noah's 500th year—perhaps as little as a few days—had passed. For even a single day is enough to start a new year and be counted as one. Noah's birthday was in Iyar and Shem's in Sivan, a month later; when the Flood came, Noah was 599 years and a few days old. So during the year of the Flood Shem would have been less than 99 complete years old. When Arpachshad was born, Shem would have been 101 years and a few months old. So "two years after the Flood" (11:10) would simply mean that the second year since the onset of the Flood had begun. There are still others who say that Shem's wife got pregnant just five months after the beginning of the Flood, when the water first started to recede. Shem would have been 100. The same kind of figuring **[W]** can be found 10 places in the book of Kings. **[X]** Either way—whether Shem or Japheth was the eldest—Ham was the middle brother. **[Y]**

KIMHI have any descendants." **Ancestor of all the descendants of Eber.** In fact, his descendants were more important than those of his brothers. **Older brother of Japheth.** Rather, "brother of Japheth, [who was] the older." Shem was fully as important as his older brother; Ham was lesser than them both. But grammatically the phrase leaves open whether Shem or Japheth was older. I think Shem was the oldest, but most commentators think it was Japheth. But literally the word means "greater," which similarly could apply to either one.

23 The descendants of Aram. The genealogy begins with Aram, the youngest, having just mentioned him at the end of the previous verse. **Uz.** Since Abraham's brother Nahor named his first-born son Uz, **[F]** it is possible that Terah, their father, married into the family of Aram. **Mash.** "Meshech" in 1 Chron. 1:17, the parallel verse.

24 Arpachshad. The genealogies of Elam, Asshur, and Lud were unnecessary and are not listed here.

25 Two sons were born to Eber. More precisely, following the usage of the same singular verb in v. 21, "there was born to Eber: two sons." See similarly 41:50. **The name of the first was Peleg.** Peleg and Joktan were not Eber's only children, for 11:17 tells us that he "begot sons and daughters." But these two get special mention because of the significance of their names. **For in his days the earth was divided.** The Dispersion was

[F] See 22:21.

NAHMANIDES be considered their ancestor in particular? **Older brother of Japheth.** Ordinarily the younger sibling is described in relation to the older: "Miriam the prophetess, Aaron's sister" (Exod. 15:20), not vice versa. And the Hebrew of our phrase does seem to be saying that *Japheth* is the older brother. The point of noting the relationship would be to say that Shem was his equal in rank. We should not think that Shem was left until last because Ham was his superior. But it seems to me that the translations are actually correct. Shem was the oldest and Ham the youngest, despite preceding him in this chapter. The qualifier regularly modifies the subject under discussion and not the person named as a relation: "Isaiah son of Amoz the prophet" (2 Kings 20:1 and elsewhere; Isaiah is the prophet); "Hananiah son of Azzur the prophet" (Jer. 28:1; Hananiah is the prophet); "Hobab son of Reuel the Midianite, Moses' father-in-law" (Num. 10:29; Hobab is the father-in-law). Rashi's point that "Shem and Japheth honored their father, while the other degraded him" simply confirms what I have been saying: Shem is presented as the brother of Noah's other righteous son, not of his shameful son, even though the latter precedes him here.

25 The name of the first was Peleg, for in his days the earth was divided. A logical reading would seem to indicate that the Dispersion took place 100 years after

[W] Counting partial years as full years. **[X]** In the later commentary he notes several of them, beginning with the conflict between 2 Sam. 5:5 and 1 Kings 2:11. **[Y]** In the later commentary he says plainly that Japheth was the eldest.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS Israelites, who are called "Hebrews" (Gersonides). Eber was Shem's favorite son, by far (Abarbanel). **Older brother of Japheth.** Rather, "brother of Japheth the older." Since elsewhere Shem is always listed first, we are informed that this chapter lists the brothers in their actual birth order (Bekhor Shor). As for the numerical calculations that suggest otherwise, remember that the Torah sometimes gives round numbers, as when the Holy One says that the Israelites will "roam the wilderness for forty years" (Num. 14:33), though there were only 39 years of the wilderness period left (Abarbanel).

25 The name of the first was Peleg, for in his days the earth was divided. It is preferable to say that he got the name both for this

NJPS the earth was divided; and the name of his brother was Joktan. 26Joktan begot Almodad, Sheleph, Hazarmaveth, Jerah, 27Hadoram, Uzal, Diklah, 28Obal, Abimael, Sheba, 29Ophir, Havilah, and Jobab; all these were the descendants of Joktan. 30Their settlements extended from Mesha as far as Sephar, the hill country to the east. 31These are the descendants of Shem according to their clans and languages, by their lands, according to their nations.

32These are the groupings of Noah's descendants, according to their origins, by their nations; and from these the nations branched out over the earth after the Flood.

11 Everyone on earth had the same

OJPS the earth divided; and his brother's name was Joktan. 26And Joktan begot Almodad, and Sheleph, and Hazarmaveth, and Jerah; 27and Hadoram, and Uzal, and Diklah; 28and Obal, and Abimael, and Sheba; 29and Ophir, and Havilah, and Jobab; all these were the sons of Joktan. 30And their dwelling was from Mesha, as thou goest toward Sephar, unto the mountain of the east. 31These are the sons of Shem, after their families, after their tongues, in their lands, after their nations.

32These are the families of the sons of Noah, after their generations, in their nations; and of these were the nations divided in the earth after the flood.

11 And the whole earth was of one

הָאָ֑רֶץ וְשֵׁ֥ם אָחִ֖יו יָקְטָֽן׃ 26 וְיָקְטָ֣ן יָלַ֔ד
אֶת־אַלְמוֹדָ֖ד וְאֶת־שָׁ֑לֶף וְאֶת־חֲצַרְמָ֖וֶת
וְאֶת־יָֽרַח׃ 27 וְאֶת־הֲדוֹרָ֖ם וְאֶת־אוּזָ֑ל
וְאֶת־דִּקְלָֽה׃ 28 וְאֶת־עוֹבָ֖ל וְאֶת־אֲבִימָאֵ֑ל
וְאֶת־שְׁבָֽא׃ 29 וְאֶת־אוֹפִ֖ר וְאֶת־חֲוִילָ֑ה
וְאֶת־יוֹבָ֔ב כָּל־אֵ֖לֶּה בְּנֵ֥י יָקְטָֽן׃ 30 וַיְהִ֣י
מוֹשָׁבָ֔ם מִמֵּשָׁ֖א בֹּאֲכָ֣ה סְפָ֑רָה הַ֖ר הַקֶּֽדֶם׃
31 אֵ֚לֶּה בְּנֵי־שֵׁ֔ם לְמִשְׁפְּחֹתָ֖ם לִלְשֹׁנֹתָ֑ם
בְּאַרְצֹתָ֖ם לְגוֹיֵהֶֽם׃
32 אֵ֚לֶּה מִשְׁפְּחֹ֣ת בְּנֵי־נֹ֔חַ לְתוֹלְדֹתָ֖ם
בְּגוֹיֵהֶ֑ם וּמֵאֵ֙לֶּה֙ נִפְרְד֣וּ הַגּוֹיִ֔ם בָּאָ֖רֶץ אַחַ֥ר
הַמַּבּֽוּל׃ פ

שביעי
א וַיְהִ֣י כָל־הָאָ֔רֶץ שָׂפָ֥ה אֶחָ֖ת

RASHI Seder Olam that they were not dispersed until the end of Peleg's life). **The name of his brother was Joktan.** He was Peleg's younger brother. Even the descendants whom Joktan begot in vv. 26–29 were all born before the Dispersion, which has not yet happened when we reach 11:1. You may think the Dispersion happened in the middle of Peleg's life, but the text is trying to explain something to us, not concealing something. It is clear, then, that the Dispersion occurred in the year Peleg died.

26 Joktan. He was modest and would belittle (*maktin*) himself. That is why he was rewarded by becoming the father of all these clans. **Hazarmaveth.** A midrash says he was named after his place: Hazarmaveth, "Deathgrass."

11:1 The same language. The holy tongue. **And the same words.** The same plan. They got together and said, "It shouldn't be entirely His decision to keep the upper worlds for Himself. Let us go up to the firmament and wage war on Him." Another reading: Their

KIMHI already getting under way when he was born. **And the name of his brother was Joktan.** His name is not explained, but it was from his time on that lifetimes began to be shorter, and the root K-T-N means "small." Eber lived 430 years (11:17) and Joktan's brother Peleg only 209 years (11:19), less than half. Eber could tell this in advance just from looking at Joktan when he was born.

29 All these were the descendants of Joktan. "All" these, inasmuch as none of the others mentioned here had 13 sons.

30 Their settlements extended from Mesha as far as Sephar. After the Dispersion. Saadia takes "Mesha" as Mecca, where the Muslims go on pilgrimage.

32 From these the nations branched out over the earth after the Flood. In fact, they did not "branch out" until after the Dispersion. "After the Flood" goes with the first part of the verse, not the second.

11:1 Everyone on earth. Literally, "the whole earth" (OJPS), but of course it means "everyone on earth." **And the same words.** The same intentions, as when the Canaanites "gathered with one accord" (Josh. 9:2)—literally, "with one mouth"—to fight against Joshua. Here, their intention was to find a place large enough for them all to dwell together and not be scattered here and there. This was 340 years after the Flood. It would seem that Noah, Shem, Eber, and Japheth were not part of this plan, since they were all both wise and righteous. In fact there must have been many wise people at this time, since (as I have explained in my comment to 5:4) many books of wisdom were composed in those days during the long lives of the individuals mentioned. And Noah and his sons had the books of wisdom that had been composed before the Flood. For that matter, it is impossible that Noah and Shem did not themselves author books of wisdom; and of course Abraham himself lived at the

IBN EZRA the Flood. So the earth was being "divided" (*niplegah*) at the time of Peleg's birth; **[Z]** hence his name, which literally refers to any of the various streams that a river splits into: "He is like a tree planted beside *streams* of water" (Ps. 1:3). Others in the Bible whose names come from the historical situations into which they were born are Ichabod, "meaning, 'The *glory has departed* from Israel'" (1 Sam. 4:21) and Immanuel, whose name was proclaimed by Isaiah (in Isa. 7:14) to announce that "God is with us." But Seder Olam is certainly correct, **[A]** and we rely on it. It follows that Abraham too was one of the builders of the tower. Don't be surprised to learn that Noah and Shem were there as well, for Shem did not die until the Patriarch Jacob was over 50.

11:1 The same language. Literally, "one" language (OJPS). I have explained the various forms of this word "one" in my *Book of Grammar*. Presumably the one language they had was Hebrew. Such names as Adam and Eve, Cain, Seth, and Peleg demonstrate this, since they all are explained by recourse to Hebrew. **[B]** Even in Aramaic and Arabic, which are closely related to Hebrew, these names do not work. **The**

[Z] See also Ibn Ezra's comment to 11:18. **[A]** See Rashi's comment. **[B]** See, respectively, 2:7, 3:20, 4:1, 4:25, and 10:25.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS reason and because life spans were halved in his time (Bekhor Shor). Ibn Ezra is wrong; the Dispersion took place at the end of Peleg's life, about three hundred years after the Flood (Abarbanel).

Chapter 11

The midrashim about this story do not really fit the context very well; undoubtedly they have deeper meanings than appears on the surface. The real sin in this story was materialism and the complicated social structures necessitated by the creation of the various trades demanded by city life (Abarbanel).

1 The same words. All of them knew all 70 languages (Bekhor Shor). Rather, "the same syntax." Different languages use different word orders as well, to the extent that even if you translate word for word, if you leave the words in their original order in the target language, the message will be incomprehensible (Gersonides). Rather, "the same things"—the natural things that all could share, for which

NJPS language and the same words. [2]And as they migrated from the east, they came upon a valley in the land of Shinar and settled there. [3]They said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks and burn them hard."—Brick served them as stone, and bitumen served them as mortar.—

וּדְבָרִים אֲחָדִים׃ [2] וַיְהִי בִּנְסָעָם מִקֶּדֶם
וַיִּמְצְאוּ בִקְעָה בְּאֶרֶץ שִׁנְעָר וַיֵּשְׁבוּ שָׁם׃
[3] וַיֹּאמְרוּ אִישׁ אֶל־רֵעֵהוּ הָבָה נִלְבְּנָה
לְבֵנִים וְנִשְׂרְפָה לִשְׂרֵפָה וַתְּהִי לָהֶם
הַלְּבֵנָה לְאָבֶן וְהַחֵמָר הָיָה לָהֶם לַחֹמֶר׃

OJPS language and of one speech. [2]And it came to pass, as they journeyed east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar; and they dwelt there. [3]And they said one to another: "Come, let us make brick, and burn them thoroughly." And they had brick for stone, and slime had they for mortar.

RASHI "one" language and speech (see OJPS) was about the unique One of the world. Another reading: They thought that *once* in every 1,656 years the sky would wobble as it had done during the Flood. "Come, let us make supports for it." (All this is from Genesis Rabbah.)

2 As they migrated from the east. Where they had been living, as we see from 10:30. They migrated from there to find a place big enough for all of them but did not find one until they got to Shinar.

3 They said to one another. The various nations said to one another, Mizraim to Cush, Cush to Put, and Put to Canaan. **Come.** The word literally means "give," but the idiom is indeed that it is always used as a summons to get ready, to prepare and join together as a group to handle a particular task, project, or difficulty. **Bricks.** For there are no stones in Babylonia, which is a plain. **Burn them hard.** As with what we call "tiles." They fire them in a kiln. **Mortar.** For plastering the wall.

KIMHI time of the Dispersion—he was 45 years old. He was most certainly very wise, and he had already recognized his Creator at the age of 40, according to a few of our Sages (though others say it happened when he was three). The other wise people were well aware that God wanted the entire earth to be settled, and that as the population grew it would be impossible anyway for all of them to live in one place, but they were forced to go along with the unwise majority. The midrash that they had decided to wage war against God is not to be taken literally; they were not that stupid. It was a "war" of faith; they wished to worship other gods. Once they were scattered, their unity of intent was destroyed as well.

2 As they migrated from the east. Where Adam had been created, and where Noah had been. They migrated west, toward Babylon. **A valley.** Some valleys are narrow and some wide; clearly this was wide enough for them to settle in. **In the land of Shinar.** See 10:10. The name is not explained, but the Sages give a midrashic explanation. **[G]**

3 Bitumen served them as mortar. The "slime" (see OJPS) was essentially mud, dirt mixed with water, while mortar is made of lime and sand mixed with water. But there were no stones there, and so there was no limestone to burn for lime.

[G] See Rashi's comment to 10:10.

IBN EZRA **same words.** Unlike today, when every language has some words that not every speaker of the language knows. In those days, the wisest and the most foolish people all used "the same words." "Same" is literally the plural of the word "one" (compare OJPS).

2 As they migrated from the east. Where Ararat obviously must have been. **They came upon a valley.** They had been looking for a good spot to build a metropolis when they found this "plain" (OJPS)—which is what the Hebrew word really means: "Let the rugged ground become level and the ridges become a *plain*" (Isa. 40:4); "like a beast descending to the *plain*" (Isa. 63:14). But possibly this plain was between two mountain ranges, making it look as if it were a "rift" in between them (that is the etymology of the word).

3 Let us make bricks. Literally, let us "brick" bricks; it is a denominative verb, derived from the noun—which is feminine, despite the fact that the plural ends in the masculine-sounding *-im*. (The plurals of "woman" and "concubine" end in *-im* too.) **And burn them hard.** To make them last. This is the strongest kind of construction; it cannot be melted either by water or by fire. **Brick served them as stone.** Instead of stone. **Bitumen served them as mortar.** Instead of clay. The same word means "bitumen" in Arabic as well.

NAHMANIDES **11:2 And as they migrated from the east.** Rashi's comment is incorrect; 10:30 refers only to the descendants of Shem. Why would the Dispersion be blamed only on them? The descendants of Japheth and of Ham outnumbered them. For that matter, the Dispersion preceded "their settlements" in the various countries. It is not as if the descendants of Japheth came back from the isles of the sea to the valley of Shinar. Ibn Ezra's point about Ararat is well taken; it must have been reasonably close to Assyria, since Sennacherib's sons fled there after killing him (see 2 Kings 19:37). It would make sense that Noah and his descendants settled in that part of the world after coming down from the mountain. When the population grew, they migrated from there to this valley. Our Sages describe this episode as a rebellion against the Holy One, but those who pursue the straightforward sense of the text say they merely wanted to stay together. If they are correct, it was a stupid plan. How could one city and one tower be enough for the whole population of the world? Or perhaps they thought if they did not scatter the population would not increase. And indeed "the children of the wicked will be cut off" (Ps. 37:38). But one who understands the expression "to make a name for ourselves" (v. 4) will know how tall they proposed to make the tower, and will understand that the entire episode is about their evil scheme. The punishment they suffered—being split apart by language and country—precisely fits their intent, for they were "cutting off the shoots." **[O]** Their sin was like that of their ancestor; see my comment to v. 5.

[O] "Cutting off the shoots" is a rabbinic idiom for heresy, drawn from the talmudic story of Elisha b. Avuyah; mystically it implies destruction of a metaphysical kind.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS they all had the same words. Originally, there was no private property. When they began to invent new things, the members of each family had their own private names for them. As these words mixed with the original ones, new, mutually unintelligible languages were created (Abarbanel).

2 And as they migrated from the east. They should have migrated back *toward* the east, toward the garden of Eden (Abarbanel). As nomads migrate in search of better pastures (Sforno). **They came upon a valley in the land of Shinar.** Which was further north, a more temperate location (Bekhor Shor).

3 Come, let us make bricks. When they used natural objects and all was held in common, no one ever had to urge anyone else to do something (Abarbanel). The bricks were to build houses and fence in the pastures (Sforno). **They said to one another.** Obviously Noah and Shem were among the builders of the tower; after all, Abraham was commanded to leave his homeland only 17 years after Noah's death, by which time there were clearly different cities, different lands, and different languages (Gersonides). This idea of building houses and fencing in the pastures was said "to one another"; it was suggested by the ordinary people (Sforno).

NJPS [4]And they said, "Come, let us build us a city, and a tower with its top in the sky, to make a name for ourselves; else we shall be scattered all over the world." [5]The LORD came down to look at the city

[4] וַיֹּאמְרוּ֮ הָבָה ׀ נִבְנֶה־לָּ֣נוּ עִ֣יר וּמִגְדָּל֒
וְרֹאשׁוֹ֙ בַּשָּׁמַ֔יִם וְנַֽעֲשֶׂה־לָּ֖נוּ שֵׁ֑ם פֶּן־נָפ֖וּץ
עַל־פְּנֵ֥י כָל־הָאָֽרֶץ׃ [5] וַיֵּ֣רֶד יְהוָ֔ה לִרְאֹ֖ת
אֶת־הָעִ֑יר וְאֶת־הַמִּגְדָּ֕ל אֲשֶׁ֥ר בָּנ֖וּ בְּנֵ֥י

RASHI **4 Else we shall be scattered.** Else He may bring some blow upon us to scatter us from here.

5 The LORD came down to look. There was no need for Him to come down. He did so to teach judges that they must not convict a defendant without looking at the evidence and making sure they understand it (see the Tanhuma). **That man had built.** Who else could have built them, asses? Camels? But the text says specifically that they were "the children of Adam" (compare OJPS), Adam who ungratefully accused "the woman You put at my side" (3:12). These people too were ungrateful and rebelled against the One who had shed abundant good on them and rescued them from the Flood.

KIMHI **4 Let us build us a city, and a tower.** The city to live in and the tower so that they could keep an eye on their livestock in the far distance. It would also serve as a signal to the shepherds who drove their flocks far out into the wilderness, so that they could find their way back to the city. **With its top in the sky.** Simply meaning "extremely tall." **To make a name for ourselves.** Let us all have the same "name," remembering even if we go far away that we belong to this city and will return to it. Otherwise, people will move away, they will settle hither and yon, and our society will be scattered to the four winds.

5 The LORD came down. The text refers to God's paying attention to the lower world as "coming down," since He is, as it were, lowering Himself to do so. **To look.** Compare the Sodom episode: "I will go down *to see* whether they have acted altogether according to the outcry that has reached Me" (18:21). See further my comments to that story. Notice that with the Flood, the Lord "saw" how corrupt the earth was (e.g., 6:12). There was no need to "come down" to investigate their corruption, which was world-famous. But the Sodom incident was a local one. Remember, though, that "came down to look" is metaphoric. **The city and tower that man had built.** That they had begun to build. They were indeed "the children of Adam" as the text literally calls them (compare OJPS); they followed their own desires and not God's purpose.

NAHMANIDES **5 The LORD came down.** The term "God" is used throughout the Flood story, but here in the story of the Dispersion only "the Lord" is used. The Flood was a punishment for corruption; this was because they had "cut down the shoots," **[P]** for which they were punished by the Ineffable Name. This also explains the "coming down," just as in the story of Sodom. A word to the wise is sufficient. **Man.** Literally, "the children of Adam." R. Berechiah said: Of what else? Donkeys? Camels? (And so forth.) **[Q]**

[P] See the comment to v. 2 and the note there. **[Q]** See Rashi's comment.

OJPS [4]And they said: "Come, let us build us a city, and a tower, with its top in heaven, and let us make us a name; lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth." [5]And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which the

RASHBAM **11:4 Come, let us build us a city, and a tower with its top in the sky, to make a name for ourselves; else we shall be scattered all over the world.** According to the straightforward sense of the text, what was the sin of the generation of the Dispersion? If it was the "tower with its top in the sky," we read elsewhere about "cities with walls sky-high" (Deut. 1:28). Rather, it is that the Holy One commanded them to "be fertile and increase" and "fill the earth" (1:28), but they chose instead to settle in a single place in order *not* to "be scattered all over the world." That is precisely why He decreed that they be scattered.

IBN EZRA **4 Come.** This is a word used to get someone's attention. It literally comes from a verb meaning "give," but it took on this meaning as well. Though the form is masculine singular, it became so colloquial that it is also used as the plural form (in addition to our verse, see Exod. 1:10) and even as the feminine singular form (e.g., 38:16). **With its top in the sky.** Or "in heaven" (OJPS). The builders of the tower were not stupid enough to imagine they could get up to heaven in this way, which would certainly take billions of years. (Think about how long it would take to get bricks up to the construction level. Then try to figure out how to get water up to the workmen.) Nor were they afraid of another Flood. For Noah and his sons, to whom God had sworn there would not be such a Flood, were there with them; and they all took their cues from those four, being their descendants. The text tells us precisely what the people were after: to build a great city to live in, and to build a tall tower to give them fame and glory, and so that those who passed by outside (like herdsmen) would notice the place. There is no occasion to be surprised by a tower "with its top in the sky." Moses himself described "large cities with walls sky-high" (Deut. 1:28). **To make a name for ourselves.** Moreover, their fame would live on after them as long as the tower stood. **Else we shall be scattered all over the world.** Their plan envisioned that they would not be scattered—but they did not know that the Holy One had other plans.

5 The LORD came down. Every action below is dependent on power from above; "actions are measured" (1 Sam. 2:3) from heaven. So the Holy One is called "riding through the heavens" (Deut. 33:26) and "enthroned in heaven" (Ps. 123:1). It is therefore metaphoric to say that the Lord "came down." What comes down are His decrees.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **4 Come, let us build us a city.** Once they were successful at making bricks, they tried something more complicated (Abarbanel). This suggestion was made by the leaders, who wanted to establish Nimrod as ruler over the whole human race (Sforno). **A tower with its top in the sky.** That is, "high in the air," as in Deut. 4:17, where birds fly "in the sky" (Hizkuni). If they had literally intended to do this, they would have built it on top of a mountain, not in a valley. They should have built it in the mountains of Ararat, which they had left. They could have used stones and not bothered making bricks (Abarbanel). **To make a name for ourselves.** A reputation for power, so that we can rule everyone else (Hizkuni). **Else we shall be scattered.** By defeat in war, if we do not manage to build a city and a tower (Hizkuni). The Holy One knew that they had to be scattered. For every location on earth has some particular deficit that can cause harm: earthquakes, hail, and the like. If they remained in one place, they might all be killed in some natural way, but if they were scattered throughout the earth there would always be others to perpetuate the species (Gersonides).

5 The LORD came down to look. The text speaks in human terms here; obviously the Lord could look and investigate perfectly well from where He was (Bekhor Shor). Up to this point, the Holy One himself directly supervised them all (Abarbanel). The Lord "comes down to look" (as with Sodom and Gomorrah) only at a stage before things have gotten so bad that punishment is required (Sforno).

NJPS and tower that man had built, 6and the LORD said, "If, as one people with one language for all, this is how they have begun to act, then nothing that they may propose to do will be out of their reach. 7Let us, then, go down and confound their speech there, so that they shall not understand one another's speech." 8Thus the LORD scattered them from there over the face of the whole earth;

הָאָדָם׃ 6 וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה הֵן עַם אֶחָד וְשָׂפָה
אַחַת לְכֻלָּם וְזֶה הַחִלָּם לַעֲשׂוֹת וְעַתָּה
לֹא־יִבָּצֵר מֵהֶם כֹּל אֲשֶׁר יָזְמוּ לַעֲשׂוֹת׃
7 הָבָה נֵרְדָה וְנָבְלָה שָּׁם שְׂפָתָם אֲשֶׁר לֹא
יִשְׁמְעוּ אִישׁ שְׂפַת רֵעֵהוּ׃ 8 וַיָּפֶץ יְהוָה
אֹתָם מִשָּׁם עַל־פְּנֵי כָל־הָאָרֶץ וַיַּחְדְּלוּ

OJPS children of men builded. 6And the LORD said: "Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language; and this is what they begin to do; and now nothing will be withholden from them, which they purpose to do. 7Come, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech." 8So the LORD scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth; and they left

RASHI **6 As one people with one language for all.** Even with the benefit of being one people with one language, **this is how they have begun. Then nothing that they may propose to do will be out of their reach.** Rather, "can anything they propose to do be prevented?" For the latter verb, see "He *curbs* the spirit of princes" (Ps. 76:13).

7 Let us, then, go down. We see that, out of excessive modesty, He consulted with His court before deciding. "Let us" is exactly the same Hebrew word translated as "Come" in v. 4 (compare OJPS). They said "Come" and He, giving measure for measure, said precisely the same thing. **Confound.** The verb is a cohortative form, expressing "let us," just as in "let us go down." **So that they shall not understand.** One asks for a brick, the other brings mud, and the first one knocks out the second one's brains.

8 Thus the LORD scattered them from there. Exactly what they feared (see v. 4) ended up happening to them. As Solomon put it, "What the wicked man plots overtakes him" (Prov. 10:24).

IBN EZRA **6 The LORD said.** To the angels. This was the reason He "came down." **One people.** With a single religion. Differences in religion produce zealotry and hatred—as do differences in language, which is why the king of Persia and Media commanded "that every man should… speak the language of his own people" (Esther 1:22). **Nothing that they may propose to do.** "Propose" is related to the similar-sounding verb that means "scheme" or "plot" (e.g., Ps. 31:14), though they are separate roots; ours is an unusual form of יזם. **[C] Will be out of their reach.** From the same root as the "fortified" towns of Deut. 3:5. What the Lord is saying is this: "If I leave them alone, they will think they can do anything they want."

7 Let us, then, go down. "Us" being the Holy One and the angels. Again, this conversation took place *before* v. 5. **And confound their speech.** All the commentators consider this a Niphal verb, like the superficially similar form in "Egypt shall be *drained* of spirit" (Isa. 19:3). But this is implausible. What sense would it make to say "Let us, then, go down and their speech is confounded"? Their speech would not be confounded just because of the going down. The form is a cohortative—"let *us* confound"—the נ indicating not Niphal but the first person plural. The proof is in v. 9, which tells us that the Lord actively "confounded" their speech. In fact, our verb is a Hiphil—*causing* their speech to be confounded—but the second ל of this geminate root, בלל, is elided. You will find a comparable example in the Hebrew of "in order to *transfer* the Ark of our God to us" (1 Chron. 13:3), though our verb does not match that one precisely either. **[D]** The elders who translated this verb into Greek as "let *Me* confound" **[E]** did very well, not least because they demonstrate that this is cohortative and not Niphal. As to how it actually happened, some think the phrase implies that their minds were disturbed, making them hate each other, and so every one of them invented a new language of his own. Others say that "He who instructs men in knowledge" (Ps. 94:10) made them all forget their original language. In my view, it was the fact that they were scattered that caused it. Nimrod reigned in Babylonia, but others became kings elsewhere; and years later, when the original generation had died, they forgot the original language. Of course, the fact that the Holy One scattered them was actually good for them. Remember "fill the earth" (1:28). Anyway, the point of the story is to explain why we do not all speak the same language.

8 They stopped building the city. That is, they were unable to complete it. They had already built some of the city and of the tower as well, as we were told in v. 5—unless that verse means that they had "built" it in the sense of having drawn up the plans for it, as in

KIMHI **6 Nothing that they may propose to do.** The Hebrew verb here carries a strong negative connotation; זמם ("propose") and זעם ("curse") are one and the same.

7 Let us. This is metaphoric, of course. The Creator does not consult with His creatures: "Whom did He consult, and who taught Him?" (Isa. 40:14). **So that they shall not understand one another's speech.** Literally, so that they shall not "hear"; understanding is the hearing of the heart. And "speech" is literally "lip," whence speech comes out. "Tongue" is used in a similar metaphoric way for language.

8 Thus the LORD scattered them. By confounding their speech. **Over the face of the whole earth.** But mostly toward the temperate north; the south, but for a few places right next to the equator, is simply too hot. **And they stopped building the city.** Not to

[C] Current scholarship thinks it is an unusual form of זמם, the same root used in Ps. 31:14. **[D]** Contemporary scholarship considers our verb to be Qal, unlike the Chronicles example. **[E]** According to B. Meg. 9a; the Greek translation we now have does not do this.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **7 Let us, then, go down and confound their speech.** For "let us go down," see also only 43:4 and 1 Sam. 14:36 (Masorah). Rather, "Let us go down and their speech will fall [into confusion]" by means of our going down. The Hebrew verb replaces the פ of the standard verb "fall" with the similar-sounding ב (Bekhor Shor). He miraculously gave each family a yen to introduce changes into the language the family spoke among themselves; in the course of time, the later generations would not know any language other than the one their own family spoke (Gersonides). Having seen what they were up to, the Holy One brought down the ministering angels to take over the supervision of the nations. But the Holy One Himself continued to participate, to supervise the righteous among them and—eventually—the people who would be Abraham's descendants (Abarbanel). **So that they shall not understand one another's speech.** "Each of them will forget all the 70 languages but one." I can't see how 69 new languages could suddenly be created all at once (Bekhor Shor). They could not have been; as Eccles. 1:9 tells us, "There is nothing new under the sun!" (Hizkuni).

8 Thus the LORD scattered them from there over the face of the whole earth. Babylon itself was certainly destroyed, just like Sodom and Gomorrah, but the valley itself is still thickly settled. Indeed, population pressure would have forced them to spread out

NJPS and they stopped building the city. 9That is why it was called Babel, because there the LORD confounded the speech of the whole earth; and from there the LORD scattered them over the face of the whole earth.

10This is the line of Shem. Shem was 100 years old when he begot Arpachshad, two years after the Flood. 11After the birth of Arpachshad, Shem lived 500 years and begot sons and daughters.

12When Arpachshad had lived 35 years, he begot Shelah. 13After the birth of Shelah, Arpachshad lived 403 years and begot sons and daughters.

14When Shelah had lived 30 years, he begot Eber. 15After the birth of Eber, Shelah lived 403 years and begot sons and daughters.

16When Eber had lived 34 years, he begot Peleg. 17After the birth of Peleg, Eber lived 430 years and begot sons and daughters.

לִבְנֹ֣ת הָעִ֑יר׃ 9 עַל־כֵּ֗ן קָרָ֤א שְׁמָהּ֙ בָּבֶ֔ל
כִּי־שָׁ֣ם בָּלַ֔ל יְהוָ֖ה שְׂפַ֣ת כָּל־הָאָ֑רֶץ וּמִשָּׁ֣ם
הֱפִיצָ֔ם יְהוָ֖ה עַל־פְּנֵ֥י כָל־הָאָֽרֶץ׃ פ
10 אֵ֚לֶּה תּוֹלְדֹ֣ת שֵׁ֔ם שֵׁ֚ם בֶּן־מְאַ֣ת שָׁנָ֔ה
וַיּ֖וֹלֶד אֶת־אַרְפַּכְשַׁ֑ד שְׁנָתַ֖יִם אַחַ֥ר
הַמַּבּֽוּל׃ 11 וַיְחִי־שֵׁ֗ם אַחֲרֵי֙ הוֹלִיד֣וֹ אֶת־
אַרְפַּכְשָׁ֔ד חֲמֵ֤שׁ מֵאוֹת֙ שָׁנָ֔ה וַיּ֖וֹלֶד בָּנִ֣ים
וּבָנ֑וֹת׃ ס 12 וְאַרְפַּכְשַׁ֕ד חַ֥י חֲמֵ֖שׁ
וּשְׁלֹשִׁ֣ים שָׁנָ֑ה וַיּ֖וֹלֶד אֶת־שָׁלַֽח׃ 13 וַיְחִ֣י
אַרְפַּכְשַׁ֗ד אַחֲרֵי֙ הוֹלִיד֣וֹ אֶת־שֶׁ֔לַח שָׁלֹ֤שׁ
שָׁנִים֙ וְאַרְבַּ֣ע מֵא֔וֹת שָׁנָ֔ה וַיּ֖וֹלֶד בָּנִ֣ים
וּבָנ֑וֹת׃ ס 14 וְשֶׁ֕לַח חַ֥י שְׁלֹשִׁ֖ים שָׁנָ֑ה
וַיּ֖וֹלֶד אֶת־עֵֽבֶר׃ 15 וַיְחִי־שֶׁ֗לַח אַחֲרֵי֙
הוֹלִיד֣וֹ אֶת־עֵ֔בֶר שָׁלֹ֤שׁ שָׁנִים֙ וְאַרְבַּ֣ע
מֵא֔וֹת שָׁנָ֔ה וַיּ֖וֹלֶד בָּנִ֣ים וּבָנ֑וֹת׃ ס
16 וַיְחִי־עֵ֕בֶר אַרְבַּ֥ע וּשְׁלֹשִׁ֖ים שָׁנָ֑ה וַיּ֖וֹלֶד
אֶת־פָּֽלֶג׃ 17 וַיְחִי־עֵ֗בֶר אַחֲרֵי֙ הוֹלִיד֣וֹ אֶת־
פָּ֔לֶג שְׁלֹשִׁ֤ים שָׁנָה֙ וְאַרְבַּ֣ע מֵא֔וֹת שָׁנָ֔ה

OJPS off to build the city. 9Therefore was the name of it called Babel; because the LORD did there confound the language of all the earth; and from thence did the LORD scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth.

10These are the generations of Shem. Shem was a hundred years old, and begot Arpachshad two years after the flood. 11And Shem lived after he begot Arpachshad five hundred years, and begot sons and daughters.

12And Arpachshad lived five and thirty years, and begot Shelah. 13And Arpachshad lived after he begot Shelah four hundred and three years, and begot sons and daughters.

14And Shelah lived thirty years, and begot Eber. 15And Shelah lived after he begot Eber four hundred and three years, and begot sons and daughters.

16And Eber lived four and thirty years, and begot Peleg. 17And Eber lived after he begot Peleg four hundred and thirty years, and begot sons and daughters.

RASHI **9 From there the LORD scattered them.** In v. 8, they were "scattered" in this world; here, we learn that they also had no place in the World to Come. Which sin was worse, theirs or that of the generation of the Flood? The latter, at least, did not raise a hand against God, while these did indeed raise a hand (as it were) against God to fight against Him. Yet the Flood generation were washed off the face of the earth, while these did not perish. The Flood generation perished because they were thieves and quarreled with each other, but the generation of the Dispersion were friendly and loving to each other: They "had the same language and the same words" (v. 1). You learn that quarreling is hateful and peace is great.

10 Shem was 100 years old. **[Q]**

[Q] The NJPS translation follows Rashi's comment.

KIMHI mention the tower. But some people did remain in the city—much smaller than they had intended it to be—and they called it Babel for the reason given in v. 9.

9 That is why it was called Babel, because there the LORD confounded the speech of the whole earth. Obviously the one who called it Babel was a Hebrew speaker, since "confounded" is *balal* only in Hebrew. You might think the city should have been named Balel, but the name is actually a portmanteau word, *ba bel* ("confusion came"). **From there the LORD scattered them.** All the 70 nations but one, which remained there.

10 Two years after the Flood. See my comment to 5:32. I remind you that the genealogies from Adam to Noah and from Noah to Abraham are given with numerical detail so we will be able to date events from the creation of the world.

IBN EZRA Josh. 24:9, where "Balak son of Zippor, the king of Moab, made ready to attack Israel" (which literally says that he "attacked") and then "sent for Balaam son of Beor" (which obviously happened before the attack). But I think our v. 5 is to be taken literally, and my original explanation here in v. 8 is correct.

9 Babel. A compound of *ba bel*, meaning "confusion came." As in the written form *bagad* of 30:11 (where one is supposed to read *ba gad*), the א is elided. See similarly Ezek. 20:29, which explains that *bamah* (במה, "shrine") is derived from *ba mah* (בא מה, "what are you visiting?"). **From there the LORD scattered them over the face of the whole earth.** Some say that there were 70 people building the tower, thus (when they were scattered) creating the 70 languages of the world. They also say that when you count up the descendants of Shem, of Japheth, and of Ham in chapter 10, you will find that there are 70 of them. But this is not correct; "Caphtorim" and "Pathrusim" (for example) are not two individuals, but two whole nations. **[F]** Besides, this method does not take Noah and his three sons into account. According to Seder Olam, there were thousands if not tens of thousands involved in the building of the tower.

10 Two years. See my comment to "older brother of Japheth" (10:21).

[F] See Ibn Ezra's comments to 10:14.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS eventually, just as it originally forced them to migrate from Ararat. But their sin was punished by expulsion, just like Adam's and Cain's. The sin of them all was to abandon nature and seek material things through artificial means. As Solomon tells us in Eccles. 7:29, "God made men plain, but they have engaged in too much scheming" (Abarbanel).

9 Babel. The place remained one of great negativity. The Judeans who were exiled there forgot their language in just 50 years (see Neh. 13:24), while here in the west we have not forgotten Hebrew despite this 2,000-year-long exile (Abarbanel).

10 This is the line of Shem. As in 6:9, "this" implies a contrast with what comes previously. Here the contrast is with those who rebelled against the Holy One (Hizkuni).

11 And begot sons and daughters. Nowhere does it say, as it does for the generations from Adam up to Noah, "then he died." Those were all dead before the next episode of the story, the Flood, but these were still alive for the next episode, Abraham's attempt to bring everyone to the worship of the Lord (Sforno).

NJPS [18]When Peleg had lived 30 years, he begot Reu. [19]After the birth of Reu, Peleg lived 209 years and begot sons and daughters.

[20]When Reu had lived 32 years, he begot Serug. [21]After the birth of Serug, Reu lived 207 years and begot sons and daughters.

[22]When Serug had lived 30 years, he begot Nahor. [23]After the birth of Nahor, Serug lived 200 years and begot sons and daughters.

[24]When Nahor had lived 29 years, he begot Terah. [25]After the birth of Terah, Nahor lived 119 years and begot sons and daughters.

[26]When Terah had lived 70 years, he begot Abram, Nahor, and Haran. [27]Now this is the line of Terah: Terah begot Abram, Nahor, and Haran; and Haran begot Lot. [28]Haran died in the lifetime of his father Terah, in his native land, Ur of the

OJPS [18]And Peleg lived thirty years, and begot Reu. [19]And Peleg lived after he begot Reu two hundred and nine years, and begot sons and daughters.

[20]And Reu lived two and thirty years, and begot Serug. [21]And Reu lived after he begot Serug two hundred and seven years, and begot sons and daughters.

[22]And Serug lived thirty years, and begot Nahor. [23]And Serug lived after he begot Nahor two hundred years, and begot sons and daughters.

[24]And Nahor lived nine and twenty years, and begot Terah. [25]And Nahor lived after he begot Terah a hundred and nineteen years, and begot sons and daughters.

[26]And Terah lived seventy years, and begot Abram, Nahor, and Haran.[27]Now these are the generations of Terah. Terah begot Abram, Nahor, and Haran; and Haran begot Lot. [28]And Haran died in the presence of his father Terah in the land of his nativity, in Ur of the Chaldees.

וַיּוֹלֶד בָּנִים וּבָנוֹת׃ ס [18] וַיְחִי־פֶלֶג שְׁלֹשִׁים שָׁנָה וַיּוֹלֶד אֶת־רְעוּ׃ [19] וַיְחִי־פֶלֶג אַחֲרֵי הוֹלִידוֹ אֶת־רְעוּ תֵּשַׁע שָׁנִים וּמָאתַיִם שָׁנָה וַיּוֹלֶד בָּנִים וּבָנוֹת׃ ס [20] וַיְחִי רְעוּ שְׁתַּיִם וּשְׁלֹשִׁים שָׁנָה וַיּוֹלֶד אֶת־שְׂרוּג׃ [21] וַיְחִי רְעוּ אַחֲרֵי הוֹלִידוֹ אֶת־שְׂרוּג שֶׁבַע שָׁנִים וּמָאתַיִם שָׁנָה וַיּוֹלֶד בָּנִים וּבָנוֹת׃ ס [22] וַיְחִי שְׂרוּג שְׁלֹשִׁים שָׁנָה וַיּוֹלֶד אֶת־נָחוֹר׃ [23] וַיְחִי שְׂרוּג אַחֲרֵי הוֹלִידוֹ אֶת־נָחוֹר מָאתַיִם שָׁנָה וַיּוֹלֶד בָּנִים וּבָנוֹת׃ ס [24] וַיְחִי נָחוֹר תֵּשַׁע וְעֶשְׂרִים שָׁנָה וַיּוֹלֶד אֶת־תָּרַח׃ [25] וַיְחִי נָחוֹר אַחֲרֵי הוֹלִידוֹ אֶת־תָּרַח תְּשַׁע־עֶשְׂרֵה שָׁנָה וּמְאַת שָׁנָה וַיּוֹלֶד בָּנִים וּבָנוֹת׃ ס [26] וַיְחִי־תֶרַח שִׁבְעִים שָׁנָה וַיּוֹלֶד אֶת־אַבְרָם אֶת־נָחוֹר וְאֶת־הָרָן׃ [27] וְאֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדֹת תֶּרַח תֶּרַח הוֹלִיד אֶת־אַבְרָם אֶת־נָחוֹר וְאֶת־הָרָן וְהָרָן הוֹלִיד אֶת־לוֹט׃ [28] וַיָּמָת הָרָן עַל־פְּנֵי תֶּרַח אָבִיו בְּאֶרֶץ מוֹלַדְתּוֹ בְּאוּר כַּשְׂדִּים׃

RASHI **28 In the lifetime of his father Terah, in his native land, Ur of the Chaldeans.** This is the idiomatic meaning of "in the presence of his father" (OJPS). But a midrash reads the idiom to say that he died at his father's hands. Terah complained to Nimrod that Abram had chopped up his idols, and Abram was thrown into a fiery furnace. Haran said to himself, "If Abram wins, I will be on his side, but if Nimrod wins, I will be on his side." When

KIMHI **27 Now this is the line of Terah.** We have already been told about Terah's "line" in the previous verse; but the Hebrew phrase also means "this is the story of Terah." **[H] Haran begot Lot.** Nahor's children are not mentioned until ch. 22. But Lot is about to travel to Canaan with Abraham.

28 Haran died in the lifetime of his father Terah, in his native land. In contrast to his father, Terah, who did not die in his native land. This is why Lot left with his grandfather. **In his native land, Ur of the**

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why does v. 27 tell us that "Haran begot Lot" without telling us about the descendants of the older brothers, especially of Nahor, who had many children? ✦ Why must we be told that "Haran died in . . . his native land" (v. 28)? We have been told many times *that* various people died—but never *where*.

IBN EZRA **18 When Peleg had lived 30 years, he begot Reu.** It is possible that he was given that name not on the day of his birth, but on the day of his death. **[G]** Consider: Shem lived for 500 years after the Flood. **[H]** Arpachshad lived for 438 years, **[I]** Arpachshad's son Shelah lived for 433 years, and Shelah's son Eber lived for 464 years; but Peleg lived for just 239 years, barely half as long. Reu lived for 239 years, the same as his father, Peleg; and Serug, at 230 years, came close to them. In any case, no one after Peleg (but for his son) lived even 239 years. **[J]**

26 He begot Abram. Abram was born in a place called Ur ("Region") of the Chaldeans. Most likely this place had a different name when Abram was born there, since the Chaldeans were actually descendants of Abram's brother Nahor. **[K]** But Moses wrote down the name by which the place was known in his day. For proof that this is where Abram was born, see v. 28, which tells us that this was the "native land" of Abram's brother Haran. Of course, it could be that the place got its name because the Chaldeans lit a fire there, as "Ur" is used in "a *fire* in Zion" (Isa. 31:9). The midrash about Abraham being thrown into a furnace **[L]** is not in the text. But if it is a genuine tradition, we accept it as words of Torah.

28 In the lifetime of his father Terah. Literally "on the face of" Terah, that is, "in the presence" (OJPS) of Terah—with Terah watching. The same expression is used of Eleazar and Ithamar, who served as priests "on the face" of their father, Aaron (Num. 3:4), that is, while Aaron was watching.

[H] See 2:4 and 25:19 in the NJPS translation.

NAHMANIDES **28 In the lifetime of his father Terah, in his native land.** Rashi's comment follows rabbinic tradition, which is of course true; I shall explain it. Our father Abraham—unlike his brother Haran—was *not* born in Chaldea; he was a descendant of Shem, and the Chaldeans (like all the inhabitants of the land of Shinar) were descendants of Ham. Note that 14:13 calls him "Abram the Hebrew," not "Abram the Chaldean." Note further what Joshua says, "In olden times, your forefathers—Terah, father of Abraham and father of Nahor—lived beyond the Euphrates" (Josh. 24:2); "in olden times" tells us that this was their origin. Joshua continues by stating plainly: "But I took your father Abraham from beyond the Euphrates" (Josh. 24:3). Since Nahor was with Terah in Haran when Abram left for Canaan (for Terah does not take Nahor out of Ur of the Chaldeans in v. 31),

[G] See Ibn Ezra's comment to 10:25. **[H]** See v. 11. **[I]** The sum of the numbers in vv. 12–13 (and similarly for the others). **[J]** So the explanation of Peleg's name in 10:25 is "in his days, life spans were halved." **[K]** See Kimhi's comment to "in his native land, Ur of the Chaldeans" (v. 28). **[L]** See Rashi's comment to v. 28.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **26 When Terah had lived 70 years, he begot Abram, Nahor, and Haran.** Like Adam and Noah, Terah too had three sons (Abarbanel).

28 Haran died in the lifetime of his father Terah, in his native land. His early death might have been more understandable if he had been uprooted; this is known to lead to illness and even death (Abarbanel). **Ur of the Chaldeans.** We see from v. 31 that this was in

NJPS Chaldeans. 29Abram and Nahor took to themselves wives, the name of Abram's wife being Sarai and that of Nahor's wife Milcah, the daughter of Haran, the father of Milcah and Iscah. 30Now Sarai was barren, she had no child.

OJPS 29And Abram and Nahor took them wives: the name of Abram's wife was Sarai; and the name of Nahor's wife, Milcah, the daughter of Haran, the father of Milcah, and the father of Iscah. 30And Sarai was barren; she had no child.

מפטיר

29 וַיִּקַּח אַבְרָם וְנָחוֹר לָהֶם נָשִׁים שֵׁם
אֵשֶׁת־אַבְרָם שָׂרָי וְשֵׁם אֵשֶׁת־נָחוֹר מִלְכָּה
בַּת־הָרָן אֲבִי־מִלְכָּה וַאֲבִי יִסְכָּה׃ 30 וַתְּהִי
שָׂרַי עֲקָרָה אֵין לָהּ וָלָד׃

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Eventually we will need to know that "Sarai was barren, she had no child" (v. 30), but why now?

RASHI Abram emerged safely, they said to Haran, "Which side are you on?" Haran said, "I am on Abram's side." They tossed him into the furnace, and he was burnt alive. That is the meaning of "Ur" of the Chaldeans—the Chaldeans' furnace, though Menahem takes "Ur" to mean "valley." As we see from Isa. 11:8, "A babe shall play over a viper's hole, and an infant pass his hand over an adder's *den*," the Hebrew word can refer to any kind of deep depression in the earth.

29 Iscah. This was Sarah. She was called Iscah because she *sactah*, "basked" in the Holy Spirit, and because everyone basked in her beauty. Moreover, Iscah is related to a word for "princess," just as Sarah is.

IBN EZRA **29 The name of Abram's wife being Sarai and that of Nahor's wife Milcah.** We are told the name of Nahor's wife because Rebekah, Rachel, and Leah were all related to this branch of the family. **Iscah.** Our predecessors say that Iscah was Sarah, and if that is the received tradition then we accept it as well. **[M]**

30 Now Sarai was barren. Those who say that it was Abraham who was barren, not Sarah, are saying the reverse of what Scripture says, as you can plainly see when the text refers to "his son Ishmael" (e.g., 17:23) and to "the sons of Keturah, Abraham's concubine" (1 Chron. 1:32).

[M] In the later commentary he says that it is *not* a tradition.

KIMHI **Chaldeans.** The land that is now called "Ur of the Chaldeans." At that time, Chesed had not yet been born. **[I]**

29 The name of Abram's wife being Sarai and that of Nahor's wife Milcah. They are specifically mentioned because God would change Sarai's name to Sarah, and because Milcah was the grandmother of Isaac's wife, Rebekah. **Haran, the father of Milcah and Iscah.** We might have thought he had no children but Lot. The midrash says that Iscah was Sarah, which fits with what Abraham said of her: "She is in truth my sister, my father's daughter though not my mother's" (20:12). Since Milcah has just been called "the daughter of Haran" but Iscah has not, possibly Sarai was Terah's granddaughter. The text does not tell us that Terah had daughters, but he might have.

30 Now Sarai was barren, she had no child. Preparing us for the miraculous stories to follow. Though Milcah apparently also did not have children for a long time, this seems to have been the result of illness; she was not naturally barren.

[I] Chaldeans are "Chasdeans" in Hebrew; Abraham's nephew Chesed (see 22:22) is understood to be their ancestor.

NAHMANIDES Aram—which (unlike Ur) is beyond the Euphrates—must have been where they were originally from. The descendants of Shem lived in "the hill country to the east" (10:30), and Balaam tell us in Num. 23:7 that Aram was there: "From Aram has Balak brought me, Moab's king from the hills of the East." The city called Haran, of course, was in Aram: "he made his way to Aram-naharaim, to the city of Nahor" (24:10). **[R]** Evidently Terah begot his older sons, Abraham and Nahor, beyond the Euphrates in his ancestral homeland, but then took Abraham to Chaldea, where his youngest, Haran, was born, while Nahor stayed behind. **[S]** Do not be misled by Ibn Ezra's comment (to v. 26) implying that the text recounts no miracle. I will have much more to say about this sort of thing in my comments to 17:1 and 46:15. For now, suffice it to say that there was indeed a miracle—whether a hidden one, by which the Holy One made the king decide to free Abraham, or a public one, by which Abraham was saved from a fiery furnace as the midrash recounts. (The pagans undoubtedly assumed that some sort of magic was being performed, as the Egyptians at first thought about Moses. In Abraham's case, they were never convinced otherwise, which is why this miracle is not described in the text.) Certainly "I am the LORD who brought you out from Ur of the Chaldeans to assign this land to you as a possession" (15:7) implies that Abraham was "brought out" from there by some sort of miracle. The verb implies being delivered from captivity, as in "I the LORD am your God who *brought you out* of the land of Egypt" (Exod. 20:2). We see from the continuation of 15:7 that from the moment they left Ur it was already the Holy One's purpose to give the land of Canaan to Abraham; certainly Terah and Abraham already intended at that point to go to Canaan and thus get as far away as possible from Chaldea, out of fear of the king (see v. 31). They delayed for a long time in Haran, though Aramaic was spoken there as it was in Ur, because they were living among their relatives. But they really wanted to get to Canaan, away from the Aramaic-speaking lands. While they were there, Abraham was commanded to do what he had intended and go to Canaan. He left his father, Terah, behind and went on with his wife and with Lot. But Terah died there in Haran, in his own "native land." (Again, see Josh. 24:2–3.) Our Sages, of course, understood "Ur" not as a place name, but as a common noun: fire, as in "Ah, I am warm! I can feel the *heat*!" (Isa. 44:16). Terah, of course, did not "go forth" (v. 31; see OJPS) from the fiery furnace, but Abraham is the main actor there. And I suppose the place may have been named after the miracle, as were Taberah, Massah, Kibroth-hattaavah, and the like. **[T]**

[R] We omit Nahmanides' discussion of Cuth, a city in Aram to which Abraham is linked in rabbinic literature and in *Guide* 3:29. He leaves open the possibility that this was the family's original home. **[S]** Note that Haran, Terah's son, spelled with ה, is not the same as Haran the city, spelled with ח. **[T]** See Deut. 9:22.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS Aram, just like Haran; that verse says nothing about their having gone to some other land. It is just that at some point the Chaldeans conquered it (Abarbanel).

29 Iscah. The name appears nowhere else but here (Masorah). If, as Rashi says, this is Sarah (who was only 10 years younger than Abraham), his younger brother Haran would have had to father her when he was six years old—not that this is impossible, according to tradition (Hizkuni).

30 Now Sarai was barren, she had no child. In context, this demonstrates Abraham's love of God. He had no offspring to leave behind to claim his share of Terah's inheritance but nonetheless rushed to fulfill God's command (Bekhor Shor). Note that Terah himself had no children until he was 70; even then, he had only three sons, of whom one died young, and the other was childless (Abarbanel).

NJPS 31Terah took his son Abram, his grandson Lot the son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, the wife of his son Abram, and they set out together from Ur of the Chaldeans for the land of Canaan; but when they had come as far as Haran, they settled there. 32The days of

OJPS 31And Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran, his son's son, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Abram's wife; and they went forth with them from Ur of the Chaldees, to go into the land of Canaan; and they came unto Haran, and dwelt there. 32And the days of Terah were

31 וַיִּקַּח תֶּרַח אֶת־אַבְרָם בְּנוֹ וְאֶת־לוֹט
בֶּן־הָרָן בֶּן־בְּנוֹ וְאֶת שָׂרַי כַּלָּתוֹ אֵשֶׁת
אַבְרָם בְּנוֹ וַיֵּצְאוּ אִתָּם מֵאוּר כַּשְׂדִּים
לָלֶכֶת אַרְצָה כְּנַעַן וַיָּבֹאוּ עַד־חָרָן וַיֵּשְׁבוּ
שָׁם׃ 32 וַיִּהְיוּ יְמֵי־תֶרַח חָמֵשׁ שָׁנִים

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why doesn't the text tell us why Terah and his family "set out together from Ur of the Chaldeans for the land of Canaan" (v. 31)? Presumably there was some simple reason. ✦ Terah took "his son Abram" and "his grandson Lot the son of Haran," but what about Nahor? ✦ How can Josh. 24:2–3 tell us that "your forefathers . . . lived beyond the Euphrates and worshiped other gods. But I took your father Abraham from beyond the Euphrates and led him through the whole land of Canaan"—implying that Haran, which Abraham left from, was their ancestral home—when our passage tells us that the family moved to Haran from Ur of the Chaldeans in Abraham's lifetime? ✦ But how could Abraham and his family, descendants of Shem, have come from Ur, which belonged to the descendants of Ham? Notice too that when Abraham sends his servant to "the land of my birth" (24:4), he goes to Mesopotamia, to Haran, not to Ur.

RASHI **31 They set out together.** Literally, "they went forth with them" (OJPS)—Terah and Abram set out with Lot and Sarai.

32 Terah died in Haran. After Abram had already left, reached Canaan, and spent more than 60 years there. Note that "Abram was seventy-five years old when he left Haran" (12:4) and that "when Terah had lived 70 years, he begot Abram" (v. 26). Terah was therefore 145 when Abram left Haran, with many years left to live. Why does the text tell us about his death before telling us that Abram left? So as not to broadcast to all that Abram did not honor his father, but abandoned him when he was an old man and went off. That is why the text tells us that Terah "died." For the

IBN EZRA **31 Terah took his son Abram.** In my view, the Lord's command to Abram in 12:1 must have occurred before Terah took him to Haran. This poses no difficulty; Num. 1:1 occurs "on the first day of the *second* month, in the second year," but it is followed in Numbers 7 by the setting up of the Tabernacle, which Exod. 40:17 tells us took place in "the *first* month of the second year." As is well known, the events in the Torah are not necessarily told in chronological order. **And his daughter-in-law Sarai.** In my view, it wrong to say (as some do) that Sarah was Abraham's sister. If she had been, our verse would certainly have said "Terah took his son Abram, his grandson Lot the son of Haran, and his daughter Sarai." Likewise, if Sarah had been Lot's sister, we would have been told that here as well. **They set out together from Ur of the Chaldeans for the land of Canaan.** This demonstrates clearly that the Lord's command to Abram to go to Canaan must have occurred before Terah "took" him out of Ur. **But when they had come as far as Haran, they settled there.** Since Nahor is not mentioned among those who set out, it is possible that he had already gone to Haran or that he went there later.

32 Terah died in Haran. Though he

KIMHI **31 Terah took his son Abram.** After Abram had been commanded to "go forth from your native land" (12:1). Abram told his father that he had been commanded to leave, and Terah agreed to go along. Since he was the father, the text gives him pride of place. **His grandson Lot the son of Haran.** Who was close to him and no longer had a living father. **The wife of his son Abram.** Why is Sarai given this extra identification? To show that she was leaving the land willingly. Her husband did not force her; rather, she followed him lovingly, ready with all her heart to do God's will. She was indeed Abram's wife—faithful in every sense of the word. **They set out together.** Literally, "they [Abram and Sarai] went forth with them [the others]" (OJPS). For Abram was the most important of the group, since the command had been given to him. **For the land of Canaan.** God had told him merely to go to "the land that I will show you" (12:1), but when leaving Aram, Canaan was the first land you would come to. Abram was certain that when he got to Canaan God would tell him whether that was the land or he was to go somewhere else. **They settled there.** Though Terah had left Ur with the intention of going to Canaan, when he got to Haran he could not find it in his heart to leave his native land completely. So he settled in Haran, which is on the border, near Canaan, to be closer to Abram, who continued on to Canaan as commanded by God.

32 The days of Terah came to 205 years. When Abram was born, Terah had been 70; so when Terah died, Abram was 135. According to Seder Olam, Abraham buried his father two years before he buried Sarah, when he was 137. Remember that Abraham was 10 years older than Sarah. **[J] Terah died in Haran.** Implicit in this statement is the understanding that he did not give up idol worship. He had only left Ur out of love for his son, not because he had changed his faith. Had he really repented, given up idolatry, and returned to faith in God, he would have followed his son to Canaan. It is possible that he did keep the other six of the Noahide commandments;

[J] Sarah was 90 and Abraham 100 when they were promised a son (17:17), and Sarah died at the age of 127 (23:1).

NAHMANIDES **31 They set out together.** Rather, "they went forth with them" (OJPS). Even though "Terah took" all of them, in this clause Abram is joined with him. After all, Abram's stature was greater than that of his father, and they were leaving on his account, not on Terah's. Note that Lot and Sarai would continue together with Abram even after Abram separated from his father.

32 Terah died in Haran. See Rashi's comment, which is taken from Genesis Rabbah. But I am surprised at both of them. It is perfectly natural for the text to tell us about the father's life, his begetting children, and his death, and only then to begin to tell us the story of the son. This is what it does in every generation. Remember that Noah himself was still alive in Abraham's day; Noah's son Shem lived till the end of Abraham's life. It could be they were prompted to make that comment because Terah's death is mentioned at all, since this is not done for any of the other descendants of Shem. Nor are the totals given for their ages at death. But here, with Terah, the text returns to the mode used in ch. 5 with the long-lived generations from Adam to Noah, and then goes even further, telling us *where* he died, which had already been mentioned in v. 31. That is why they said the text wanted to make it look as if Abraham had been with him when he died. In fact, the story of Abraham has already begun by now, so the text may have considered that it was high time to conclude the story of Terah. As for saying that the wicked are called "dead" even during their lives, that too is surprising; the Sages have already pointed out that telling Abraham "You shall go to your fathers in peace" (15:15) was tantamount to informing him that Terah had a place in the World to Come. Perhaps they meant that he had been evil but had repented on his deathbed; Rashi's comment to that verse may

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **32 The days of Terah came to 205 years.** It was, therefore, not death that prevented him from going to Canaan; he somehow lost interest (Abarbanel). **Haran.** The ן of this word is indeed supposed to be reversed (Masorah).

NJPS Terah came to 205 years; and Terah died in Haran.

OJPS two hundred and five years; and Terah died in Haran.

וּמָאתַ֖יִם שָׁנָ֑ה וַיָּ֥מָת תֶּ֛רַח בְּחָרָ֖ן׃ ס

RASHI wicked are called "dead" even during their lives, just as the righteous are called "living" even after their deaths, as in 2 Sam. 23:20, where Benaiah son of Jehoiada is called "son of a living man." **[R]** R. Aaron explained the reversed ן of Haran **[S]** to indicate that God's anger (*ḥaron*) was loose in the world until the time of Abram.

[R] This follows the written text; the reading variation is "son of a valiant man." **[S]** This does not appear in the texts we have today.

IBN EZRA had set out to go to Canaan, when he reached Haran he liked it and settled there.

KIMHI certainly Abraham would have tried his best to guide him on the right path. But those generations were so steeped in idolatry that they could not give it up without enormous difficulty. As Joshua the prophet said, "In olden times, your forefathers—Terah, father of Abraham and father of Nahor—lived beyond the Euphrates and worshiped other gods" (Josh. 24:2). Had Terah repented, Joshua would never have said this about him.

NAHMANIDES be interpreted the same way. Or perhaps he only earned his place in the World to Come through the merit of his son, and Abraham did not know of this until being told, "You shall go to your fathers in peace." As the midrash points out, olive wood and vine branches cannot be burnt on the Temple altar, because olive oil and wine are brought as offerings; the fruit exempts the tree it came from. So too Abraham exempted Terah.

LEKH LEKHA

לך לך

NJPS 12 The LORD said to Abram, "Go forth from your native land and from your father's house to the land that I will show you.

OJPS 12 Now the LORD said unto Abram: "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto the land that I will show thee.

יב וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־אַבְרָם לֶךְ־לְךָ מֵאַרְצְךָ וּמִמּוֹלַדְתְּךָ וּמִבֵּית אָבִיךָ אֶל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אַרְאֶךָּ׃

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why does the Lord tell Abraham "Go forth from your native land" (v. 1) when he has already left it in 11:31? ✦ Why does He further say "from your father's house" instead of just "from Haran"? ✦ Why does He mysteriously say "to the land that I will show you" and not just "to Canaan"? Since he was already heading there anyway in 11:31, it would be no great challenge. ✦ Since He did *not* tell him to go to Canaan, how did Abraham know which direction to go?

RASHI **12:1 Go forth.** Literally, "go for you," for your own good and profit. There, I will make you into a great nation; here, you will not even have children. Also, I will make the whole world aware of your qualities. **From your native land.** Has he not already left his native land with his father and gone to Haran? But now he is told to leave it even farther behind and to go forth **from your father's house. To the land that I will show you.** He did not tell him immediately which land it was, in order to make it seem special to him, and to be able to reward him for his response to each divine communication. The same is true of calling Isaac "your son" and "your favored one" and "whom you love" (all 22:2) before naming him. Similarly, Abraham is told in that verse to offer Isaac "on one of the heights that I will point out to you." Jonah receives the same kind of instructions when he is told to

RASHBAM **12:1 To the land that I will show you.** Abram was of the seed of Shem, to whom the Canaanites had been given as slaves; **[A]** that is why the Holy One brought him there to "walk about the land" (13:17).

[A] See 9:26.

IBN EZRA **12:1 Go forth.** The Holy One commanded Abraham while he was still in Ur to leave the country where he had grown up and his birthplace (which might have been elsewhere than Ur) and also his father's house (see OJPS). For, as Joshua said, "Terah, father of Abraham and father of Nahor, lived beyond the Euphrates and worshiped other gods" (Josh 24:2). It is not right for the holy to remain among the profane; and of course He wanted to teach him the ways of God. Moreover, the Holy One knew that even though Terah would set out for Canaan he would settle in Haran. Terah did not die for another 60 years after Abraham left "his father's house" (in Haran), though the text did not specify how old he **[A]** was when he left Ur. **The land that I will show you.** Which he subsequently did, since in v. 5 "they set out for the land of Canaan." Or perhaps "showing" him refers to what He says in 13:15, "I give all the land that you *see* to you and your offspring forever."

[A] It is not clear whether "he" is Abram or Terah.

KIMHI **12:1 The LORD said to Abram.** He said this in Ur, as we understand from "I am the LORD who brought you out from Ur of the Chaldeans" (15:7). But this command may have come to him a second time in Haran. **Go forth.** The Hebrew is simply an idiom; see also "he went his way" (Exod. 18:27), "so I will go" (Jer. 5:5), "I will turn back" (Num. 22:34), and the like. **From your native land and from your father's house.** It is hard to leave the "country" (OJPS) where one has lived for many years, all the more so if it is one's "native land" (really the second term of three in this phrase), and still more to leave one's family and go to a strange land. **To the land that I will show you.** Had He told him to go to an equally good land, or a better one, it would not have been so difficult. But He did not

NAHMANIDES **12:1 Go forth.** There is really no need for Rashi's comment. The "you" of "get *you* out" (compare OJPS) is simply a feature of the language; see the Hebrew of Deut. 2:13, Jer. 5:5, Song 2:11, and many others. The Sages used this expression midrashically in Num. 10:2 and Deut. 10:1 because in those cases Moses was not making the things "for himself" and he might have been given the command "make" without the pronoun (as he was in Exod. 26:1). **From your native land and from your father's house.** Ibn Ezra's comment is incorrect. If this command had been given to him in Ur, we would have to assume that this was Abram's journey, taken at God's behest, and that Terah simply went along—of his own free will. Yet 11:31 tells us that "Terah took" Abram and the others. It was Terah's idea. Abram was following his father to Canaan. Furthermore, "I took your father Abraham from beyond the Euphrates and led him through the whole land of Canaan" (Josh. 24:3) would have to say, "I took your father Abraham from Ur of the Chaldeans." The fact that when Abraham sends Eliezer "to the land of my birth [to] get a wife for my son Isaac" (24:4) he goes "to Aram-naharaim, to the city of Nahor" (24:10) poses a further difficulty for both Ibn Ezra and Rashi. Eliezer himself says he was further instructed, "You shall go to my father's house" (24:38). Yet Ibn Ezra was mixed up enough to say in his comment to 24:4 that Eliezer was sent to Haran and to Ur! How many native lands did Abram have? What really happened is explained in my comment to 11:28. Haran was both his native land and his ancestral homeland, and that is where he received the commandment to leave his family. Genesis Rabbah says this as well. As for the three things he is commanded to leave (see OJPS), each would be more difficult than the last; he is being told that he must leave everything for the sake of his love of the Holy One. **To the land that I will show you.** He was "wandering from nation to nation, from one kingdom to another" (Ps. 105:13) until he reached Canaan, when the Holy One appeared to him and said, "I will assign this land to your heirs" (v. 7). By this he was "shown" which land was meant, and he stopped and settled there. When v. 5 says that "they set out for the land of Canaan," it does not mean they intended to settle there. He did not yet know that was the land he had been commanded to go to. But "the righteous man holds to his way" (Job 17:9); that is where both he and his father had intended to go when they left Ur, so he kept going toward Canaan. As Abraham himself says, "God made me *wander* from my father's house" (20:13) "like a lost sheep" (Ps. 119:176). But it is at least possible to suggest that

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **12:1 Go forth.** The Hebrew expression (preceded by "and") also occurs only in 22:2 (Masorah). He hinted to him that he would live for another 100 years—the numerical value of the Hebrew phrase. But in straightforward Hebrew it is just an expression that has no special meaning (Bekhor Shor). He sent him to Canaan because that was the land in which it was most likely that the divine overflow would reach him (Gersonides). The Torah recounts three stages of the beginning of the Israelite nation: first, Adam, at the vegetable stage of the nation; second, Noah, at the animal stage; and third, Abraham, the intellectual stage, the stage at which one abandons the material things that interfere with the quest for perfection. But, as you know, despite their symbolism, all these stories also actually happened to the individuals named in them. Contra Rashi, the Hebrew idiom here means "go by yourself" and not the way you left Ur, with your family (Abarbanel). **And from your father's house.** Don't worry about your inheritance (Bekhor Shor). He

NJPS [2]I will make of you a great nation,
And I will bless you;
I will make your name great,
And you shall be a blessing.
[3]I will bless those who bless you
And curse him that curses you;
And all the families of the earth
Shall bless themselves by you."

OJPS [2]And I will make of thee a great nation,
and I will bless thee,
and make thy name great;
and be thou a blessing.
[3]And I will bless them that bless thee,
and him that curseth thee will I curse;
and in thee shall all the families of the earth
be blessed."

2 וְאֶעֶשְׂךָ לְגוֹי גָּדוֹל
וַאֲבָרֶכְךָ
וַאֲגַדְּלָה שְׁמֶךָ
וֶהְיֵה בְּרָכָה׃
3 וַאֲבָרְכָה מְבָרֲכֶיךָ
וּמְקַלֶּלְךָ אָאֹר
וְנִבְרְכוּ בְךָ
כֹּל מִשְׁפְּחֹת הָאֲדָמָה׃

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ What had Abraham done to deserve the promise, "I will make of you a great nation" (v. 2)? ✦ Why did the Holy One not tell Abraham why He wanted him to go to Canaan? ✦ What did He mean by commanding Abraham (see OJPS) to "be a blessing"? ✦ What does it mean for all the families of the earth to "be blessed" by Abraham (again, see OJPS)?

RASHI go to Nineveh "and proclaim to it what I tell you" (Jon. 3:2).

2 I will make of you a great nation. Travel causes three things to diminish: fertility, wealth, and fame. That is why Abraham needed these three blessings, promising him children, wealth, and fame. **And I will bless you.** With wealth. (See Genesis Rabbah.) **And you shall be a blessing.** Blessings will be given through you, as up to now they were given through Me. I blessed Adam, Noah, and you; from now on, you will bless whomever you like. (Again, see Genesis Rabbah.) Another reading: "I will make of you a great nation" refers to the words "God of Abraham"; **[A]** "and I will bless you" refers to "God of Isaac"; and "I will make your name great" refers to "God of Jacob." But the benediction will not end with all three names. "And you shall be a blessing" means that your name alone will end the benediction, not theirs.

3 And all the families of the earth shall bless themselves by you. Despite the many midrashim about this, the straightforward meaning refers to the following situation: A man says to his son, "May you be like

[A] In the first of the Eighteen Benedictions of the Amidah, the main prayer of Jewish services.

RASHBAM **3 And all the families of the earth shall bless themselves by you.** Rather, "shall graft themselves on to you." That is, they shall intermix with your family. Note that this form is Niphal, not the Pual that is the passive of the Piel "bless." **[B]**

[B] See Special Topics, "Biblical Hebrew," and Rashbam's comment to 28:14.

IBN EZRA **2 I will make of you a great nation.** He became the father of eight families. **[B]**

3 I will bless those who bless you and curse him that curses you. "Those" who bless, in the plural; "him" who curses, in the singular—for to know Abram was to love him. A great scholar said in his book that this "blessing" has something to do with grafting plants. I have no idea who got him into this mess.

[B] Those of Ishmael, Isaac, and his six sons by Keturah (see 25:2).

KIMHI tell him whether the land was good or not. The point of all this was to display Abraham's love for God and his willingness, on account of it, to do what God wanted.

2 I will make of you a great nation. Even though your wife is barren, I will heal her. **I will make your name great.** I will make you famous. — As indeed happened to him in the war with the four kings, **[A]** after which we find the Hittites telling him, "you are the elect of God among us" (23:6). **And you shall be a blessing.** The Hebrew uses the imperative form (see OJPS), but NJPS has the sense. See similarly "*You shall die* on the mountain" (Deut. 32:50), among others.

3 I will bless those who bless you. Your allies and those who seek your welfare. They will realize that their own welfare comes from their friendship with you. Just so, "the LORD blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake" (39:5). As Laban tells Jacob, "I have learned

[A] See ch. 14.

NAHMANIDES Abraham knew right from the beginning that the land of Canaan was the inheritance of the Holy One, that He would give him his portion there, and that he assumed that "the land that I will show you" was Canaan, either in whole or in part. So he set out for Canaan. And the "land that He would show him" was indeed there.

2 And you shall be a blessing. The blessing by which they shall bless each other: "May God make you like Abraham."

3 And all the families of the earth shall bless themselves by you. Not just those of your own land. Alternatively, the Hebrew verb could mean that they would "be blessed" (OJPS) on his account.

But our text does not tell the whole story. What sense does it make that the Holy One tells Abraham, "Leave your native land and I will give you untold blessing," without our first being told that he was a servant of God or blamelessly righteous or that his leaving one land and going to another would bring him closer to God? The usual thing is for the text to say, "Follow Me and obey Me, and I will treat you well," as indeed it does with David and Solomon, **[A]** and indeed throughout the Torah (see Lev. 26:3–13 and Deut. 28:1–14). Isaac is given the promise "for the sake of My servant Abraham" (26:24), but why would Abraham be given this sort of promise just for leaving his

[A] See 1 Kings 2:4 and 1 Kings 3:10–14, respectively.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS delayed in Haran to see whether he could budge his father; when he saw that Terah had decided to stay put, he left for Canaan (as originally planned) with whoever else was willing to go (Gersonides). **To the land that I will show you.** He did not want Abraham's relatives to know where he was going and follow him (Abarbanel).

2 I will make of you a great nation. Corresponding to the instruction to leave "your father's house" (Abarbanel). **I will make your name great.** Literally, "I will make your name bigger"—one letter longer than it is now (Hizkuni). Corresponding to the instruction to leave (see OJPS) "your kindred" (Abarbanel). **Be a blessing.** That is, be "a man of blessing," one whose actions make him worthy of receiving divine providence (Gersonides).

3 I will bless those who bless you and curse him that curses you. Do not be afraid because you will be alone; I will reward your

NJPS [4]Abram went forth as the LORD had commanded him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he left Haran. [5]Abram took his wife Sarai and his brother's son Lot, and all the wealth that they had amassed, and the persons that they had acquired in Haran; and they set out for the land of Canaan. When they arrived in

OJPS [4]So Abram went, as the LORD had spoken unto him; and Lot went with him; and Abram was seventy and five years old when he departed out of Haran. [5]And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran; and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of

4 וַיֵּלֶךְ אַבְרָם כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר אֵלָיו יְהוָה וַיֵּלֶךְ
אִתּוֹ לוֹט וְאַבְרָם בֶּן־חָמֵשׁ שָׁנִים וְשִׁבְעִים
שָׁנָה בְּצֵאתוֹ מֵחָרָן׃ 5 וַיִּקַּח אַבְרָם אֶת־
שָׂרַי אִשְׁתּוֹ וְאֶת־לוֹט בֶּן־אָחִיו וְאֶת־כָּל־
רְכוּשָׁם אֲשֶׁר רָכָשׁוּ וְאֶת־הַנֶּפֶשׁ אֲשֶׁר־
עָשׂוּ בְחָרָן וַיֵּצְאוּ לָלֶכֶת אַרְצָה כְּנָעַן

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ "Abram was seventy-five years old when he left Haran" (v. 4)—so what? ✦ Why are we told both that "Lot went with him" and that he "took . . . his brother's son Lot" (v. 5)? ✦ For that matter, did Lot "go" or was he "taken"?

RASHI Abraham." And this is what blessing "by" someone means throughout the Bible. What Jacob said to Joseph proves it: "By you shall Israel invoke blessings, saying: God make you like Ephraim and Manasseh" (48:20).

5 The persons that they had acquired in Haran. Literally, that they had "made"—they had brought them under the wings of the Shekhinah. Abraham would convert the men, and Sarah would convert the women. The verse credits them with actually "making" these people. But the straightforward sense of the expression is "the slaves they had bought." The Hebrew verb, which literally means "make" or "do," is used to indicate acquisition and earnings in "Jacob . . . has *built up* all this wealth" (31:1).

IBN EZRA **4 Abram went forth.** The root of the verb is ילך. One grammarian who tongue-lashed his betters claims that it is הלך—but that is just crazy. ה never disappears from the beginning of a root. **[C]**

5 The wealth. Their livestock: "for their possessions were so great that they could not remain together" (13:6). **The persons that they had acquired.** Literally, "the souls that they had made," referring to homeborn slaves; but one can indeed "make" something in the sense of acquiring it: "my own power and the might of my own hand have *won* this wealth for me" (Deut. 8:17). But some say they "made" these souls in the sense of teaching them to worship the Holy One. **They set out.** See my comment to "the land that I will show you" (v. 1).

[C] Current usage agrees with the other grammarian.

KIMHI by divination that the LORD has blessed me on your account" (30:27). **And curse him that curses you.** Many fewer would do so. **And all the families of the earth shall bless themselves by you.** Rather, they "shall . . . be blessed" (OJPS); I will send blessing to every nation among whom you live, starting on the day you arrive.

4 Abram went forth. First to Haran, where he left his father, and then to Canaan. **As the LORD had commanded him.** He left without asking any questions. **Abram was seventy-five years old when he left Haran.** He may have remained there for a while trying to persuade his father to come along.

5 All the wealth that they had amassed. He and Lot. **The persons that they had acquired.** The Sages apply this midrashically to Abraham and Sarah, but in fact Lot too shared Abraham's faith (which is why he accompanied him) and tried to persuade people to believe in the Lord and worship Him alone.

NAHMANIDES homeland? It makes no sense, except that the people of Ur had treated him extremely badly on account of his faith in the Holy One. He fled from them to go to Canaan, but was held up in Haran. The Holy One told him to leave them as well and do what he had originally intended to do: to serve Him by calling people in the name of the Lord, in the chosen land. There He would make his name great, and all those nations would bless themselves by him—the opposite of what happened in Ur, where they treated him with contempt, cursed him, and threw him into a dungeon or a fiery furnace. He told him that He would bless those who blessed him and curse the rare individual who might curse him. That is what this passage is about. The Torah does not like to linger over the opinions of idolaters and did not want to flesh out the religious dispute between Abraham and the Chaldeans, just as it barely mentioned the creation of idolatry in the generation of Enosh. **[B]**

I will give you a general principle that you should understand with regard to all the upcoming passages about Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It is something quite important that our Sages mention just briefly: Everything that happened to the Patriarchs is symbolic of what would happen to their descendants. That is why these stories go on at such length about the various journeys, the digging of wells, and all sorts of other incidents that one might think superfluous, even pointless. But they all come to teach about the future. Whenever such an incident occurs to one of these prophets (the Patriarchs), one can comprehend something that was decreed to befall his descendants. You should know that everything "decreed by the Watchers" (Dan. 4:14), once the decree leaves the realm of potential and is (symbolically) activated, will inevitably come to pass. That is why the prophets performed actions as part of their prophecies, as when Jeremiah told Seraiah, **[C]** "When you finish reading this scroll, tie a stone to it and hurl it into the Euphrates. And say, 'Thus shall Babylon sink and never rise again, because of the disaster that I will bring upon it'" (Jer. 51:63–64). The story of Elisha and King Joash and the arrows is another such example. **[D]** That is why the Holy One had Abraham lay claim to the land and did all kinds of things to him symbolizing what would happen in the future to his offspring. Understand this. I will make a start at explaining some of these in detail in the following verses, with the help of God.

[B] See Rashi's comment to 4:26. **[C]** Our texts of Nahmanides say that he told Baruch (Seraiah's brother). **[D]** See 2 Kings 13:14–19.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS friends and protect you from your enemies (Bekhor Shor). The promise to bless them corresponds to the instruction to leave (see again OJPS) "your country." These three promises were intended to remove Abraham's doubts about leaving (Abarbanel).

4 Lot went with him. Obviously Abram was not commanded to separate himself from everyone in his "father's house" (v. 1), or this would have been a great sin (Gersonides). Lot went with him against Abraham's will (Abarbanel).

5 All the wealth that they had amassed. Rather than leaving most of it behind in case the promises did not come true and he had to return (Bekhor Shor). **The persons that they had acquired in Haran.** Whom they had acquired for the Lord. This was the start of the giving of the Torah (Hizkuni). **They arrived in the land of Canaan.** Unlike Terah, who in 11:31 had also "set out for the land of Canaan" (Sforno).

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NJPS the land of Canaan, 6Abram passed through the land as far as the site of Shechem, at the terebinth of Moreh. The Canaanites were then in the land.

7The LORD appeared to Abram and said, "I will assign this land to your offspring." And he built an altar there to the

OJPS Canaan they came. 6And Abram passed through the land unto the place of Shechem, unto the terebinth of Moreh. And the Canaanite was then in the land.

7And the LORD appeared unto Abram, and said: "Unto thy seed will I give this land"; and he builded there an altar unto

וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן׃ 6 וַיַּעֲבֹר אַבְרָם בָּאָרֶץ
עַד מְקוֹם שְׁכֶם עַד אֵלוֹן מוֹרֶה וְהַכְּנַעֲנִי
אָז בָּאָרֶץ׃
7 וַיֵּרָא יְהוָה אֶל־אַבְרָם וַיֹּאמֶר לְזַרְעֲךָ
אֶתֵּן אֶת־הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת וַיִּבֶן שָׁם מִזְבֵּחַ

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ What is the point of saying that "the Canaanites were then in the land" (v. 6)? ✦ Why does the Holy One tell Abraham "I will assign this land to your heirs" (v. 7) before promising him the land or the heirs? ✦ Why did Abraham build an altar to "the LORD who had appeared to him"? Was there some other "Lord"?

RASHI **6 Abram passed through the land.** Rather, he "crossed into" it—he did not pass all the way through. **As far as the site of Shechem.** To pray for the sons of Jacob, when they would come to fight against Shechem. **[B] At the terebinth of Moreh.** This is another name for Shechem. He showed him Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal, where the Israelites would take on the obligations of Torah by swearing an oath. **[C] The Canaanites were then in the land.** The Canaanites were at that time just conquering the land from the descendants of Shem, to whose possession it had fallen when Noah allocated the different parts of the world to his sons; "King Melchizedek of Salem" (14:18) is actually Shem.

7 I will assign this land to your heirs. The Canaanites are taking it over now, but I will return it to your descendants, who are of the seed of Shem. **And he built an altar there.** To celebrate the good news that he would have descendants and the good news that they would get the land of Israel.

[B] See Genesis 34. **[C]** See Josh. 8:30–35.

IBN EZRA **6 The site of Shechem.** The site that, by the time Moses wrote this, had been named after Shechem; it was not called Shechem in Abraham's day. **Terebinth.** The Hebrew word is a slight variation of the word used in 35:4. A terebinth is a kind of tree. Some take the similar-sounding "El" of El-paran (14:6) to mean "field" and think that is the meaning here as well. **Moreh.** Some think this is another name for Mamre, Abraham's ally in 14:13, but it could be someone else; and perhaps Elon-Moreh is simply a place name. **The Canaanites were then in the land.** Perhaps this means that the Canaanites had now seized it from someone else. If not, then there is a mystery here, about which intelligent people will keep silent. **[D]**

7 The LORD appeared to Abram. Prophetically. Note the lengthening of the vowel under the י to compensate for the missing נ of the Niphal (because the ר cannot take a *dagesh*). **[E] Who had appeared to him.** The Hebrew uses a participle here, also in Niphal to match the first verb.

[D] See Ibn Ezra's introduction to Deuteronomy 1 and the notes there. **[E]** See Special Topics, "Biblical Hebrew."

KIMHI **6 As far as the site of Shechem.** Evidently these are the locations one would pass through when arriving in Canaan from Haran. **At the terebinth of Moreh.** Rather, "as far as the terebinth of Moreh" (compare OJPS), where he moved after having lived for a while in Shechem. Note that Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal are indeed nearby: "Both are on the other side of the Jordan . . . near Gilgal, by the terebinths of Moreh" (Deut. 11:30). But the correct translation is "the plain of Moreh," Moreh being the person it was named after. **The Canaanites were then in the land.** The fact that none of them said one word to Abraham about his vast flocks and herds grazing on their land demonstrates the kind of great miracles that the Holy One does for those who love Him.

7 The LORD appeared to Abram. At Elon-Moreh, to tell him that this was the land He had told him He would show him. **I will assign this land to your heirs.** Even though I moved you here from your homeland, I did not intend to give it to you immediately. That is simply not possible. You are just one person, and you cannot settle the land until your descendants are many. But it is yours already; you can certainly go wherever you like and graze your animals without anyone saying a word to you. — After all, even when there were 601,730 Israelites (Levites excepted), He told them He would "dislodge those peoples before you little by little; you will not be able to put an end to them at once, else the wild beasts would multiply to your hurt" (Deut. 7:22). **And he built an altar there to the LORD.** In thanks.

NAHMANIDES **6 Abram passed through the land as far as the site of Shechem.** Not the person Shechem son of Hamor, but the city after which he was named. Rashi's comment about this is correct; I would just add that Abraham took possession of this place before the Holy One gave him the land, as a hint to him that his descendants too would conquer that place in advance, before they were entitled to it, before the transgression of its inhabitants reached its full measure, at which point they could be expelled from it. **At the terebinth of Moreh.** Which was at the site of Shechem. It is called "the terebinths of Moreh" as well (see Deut. 11:30). Also here, somewhat closer to the Jordan, were Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal, where they came when they first entered the land. But "the terebinths of Mamre" (13:18) is a different place, in the Hebron region, far from the Jordan. Mamre, moreover, is a person, an Amorite (see 14:13), just as Moreh is a person (a Canaanite). But "Mamre" alone (as opposed to "the terebinths of Mamre") refers to the place; see, e.g., 23:19 and 35:27. The man was named after the city (though there is a dispute in Genesis Rabbah about this). **The Canaanites were then in the land.** They had not yet been expelled. When the Lord indeed promised him the land, he traveled on and pitched his tent "with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east" (v. 8)—the first place that Joshua would conquer in battle. **[E]** But saying the Canaanites were there might also imply that, since the Holy One had not "shown him the land" He had promised him, Abraham came as far as Shechem but, fearing the fierce, impetuous Canaanites, he had not built an altar anywhere until he reached the terebinth of Moreh, where the Lord promised to assign the land to his heirs.

7 Heirs. Literally, "offspring." See my comment to "there was quarreling" (13:7). **The LORD who had appeared to him.** His fear disappeared, and he built an altar to serve the Lord in public. And he wanted to give thanks to the Lord for appearing to him; up to this

[E] See Joshua 7. Jericho was captured (in Joshua 6) miraculously, not in battle.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **6 The Canaanites were then in the land.** Despite Rashi's comment here, he himself says in his comments to Num. 13:22 and Deut. 11:10 that Ham built Hebron, so it must have belonged to him. In fact, this phrase was written this way to be read from the future perspective of the Israelites once they had taken possession of the land (Hizkuni).

7 I will assign this land to your heirs. But He did not instruct him to settle there yet, or he would not have gone down to Egypt. It is more as if He told him, "This would be a good place for you to live" (Bekhor Shor).

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NJPS LORD who had appeared to him. 8From there he moved on to the hill country east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east; and he built there an altar to the LORD and invoked the LORD by name. 9Then Abram journeyed by stages toward the Negeb.

10There was a famine in the land, and Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn

OJPS the LORD, who appeared unto him. 8And he removed from thence unto the mountain on the east of Beth-el, and pitched his tent, having Beth-el on the west, and Ai on the east; and he builded there an altar unto the LORD, and called upon the name of the LORD. 9And Abram journeyed, going on still toward the South.

10And there was a famine in the land; and Abram went down into Egypt to

יְהוָה הַנִּרְאֶה אֵלָיו׃ 8 וַיַּעְתֵּק מִשָּׁם הָהָרָה מִקֶּדֶם לְבֵית־אֵל וַיֵּט אהלה אָהֳלֹה בֵּית־אֵל מִיָּם וְהָעַי מִקֶּדֶם וַיִּבֶן־שָׁם מִזְבֵּחַ יְהוָה וַיִּקְרָא בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה׃ 9 וַיִּסַּע אַבְרָם הָלוֹךְ וְנָסוֹעַ הַנֶּגְבָּה׃ פ 10 וַיְהִי רָעָב בָּאָרֶץ וַיֵּרֶד אַבְרָם מִצְרַיְמָה

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why does Abraham not "invoke the Lord" here as he does at the next altar? ✦ After this whole journey and these great promises, why does Abraham not trust the Holy One to save him from the famine? Instead, he immediately goes down to Egypt (v. 10).

RASHI **8 From there he moved on.** Rather, "from there he moved [his tent]." **With Bethel on the west.** The Hebrew idiom "east of Bethel" earlier in the verse might be misunderstood to say that he moved "*from* east of Bethel"; our phrase clarifies the expression. **His tent.** The expected ו suffix for "his" is spelled here with ה, which more commonly indicates "hers." He first pitched his wife's tent, and then his own (Genesis Rabbah). **He built there an altar.** He saw prophetically that his descendants would one day stumble into sin there—by the transgression of Achan **[D]**—and he prayed at the spot on their behalf.

9 By stages. He would stay in one place for a month or more and then travel on and pitch his tent elsewhere. **Toward the Negeb.** But each stage carried him farther southward, in the direction of Jerusalem, toward Mount Moriah, which was Judah's inheritance. For they would take their allotment in southern Israel.

10 There was a famine in the land. In that land only, not "on earth," as the Hebrew might be understood. This was a test of Abraham, to find out whether he would have

[D] See Joshua 7.

IBN EZRA **8 From there he moved on.** The verb is Hiphil and therefore transitive: he "removed" (OJPS) the tent that he will pitch later in the verse. But the sense is of course as NJPS takes it—he moved to a different location. **On the west.** The Hebrew idiom is "toward the sea," for the Great Spanish Sea is to the west of Israel. The "sea" does not refer to the ocean, which is far removed from Israel. The verse is saying that Abraham traveled from east of Bethel far enough west so that Ai was now to the east of his camp. **And invoked the LORD by name.** That is, he prayed. Or he "called" (OJPS) on others to worship the Lord.

9 Toward the Negeb. Toward the south. As we know from Aramaic, "Negeb" means "dry"; see Onkelos to 8:13. For the south is very hot, and the heat dries it up. Compare "you have given me away as Negeb-land; so give me springs of water" (Josh. 15:19).

10 There was a famine in the land. Of Canaan. Not "on earth," as the Hebrew might also be taken to mean.

KIMHI **8 From there he moved on.** To see more of the land. **And pitched his tent.** Long enough to build another altar. **And invoked the LORD by name.** Rather, he "called" (OJPS) on the other inhabitants of the hill country to worship the Lord, showing them why it made sense to worship Him alone. He did indeed bring many of them back to faith in God. Notice that he will call on them again in 13:4 in the same place; he seems to have known that these particular people were close to repentance.

9 By stages. More literally, "going on still" (OJPS) from place to place.

10 There was a famine in the land. But Abraham still did not question the Holy One. **To Egypt.** Ordinarily there is no famine in Egypt even when there is one in other lands, since they are not dependent on rain but on the waters of the Nile. Abraham had too many

NAHMANIDES point, He had not made Himself apparent to him visually but only spoken to him, whether in a dream or via the Holy Spirit. But the phrase could refer to the religious mystery of the sacrificial offering. One who is enlightened will understand. **[F]**

8 And invoked the LORD by name. That is, according to Onkelos, he prayed to Him, as in "I have called on Your name, O LORD, from the depths of the Pit" (Lam. 3:55). But actually he called out the name of the Lord there, before the altar, in a loud voice, making Him and His divinity known to all humanity (see Genesis Rabbah). When he tried to teach them in Ur, they refused to listen, but here in the land where he had been promised "I will bless those who bless you" (v. 3) he grew accustomed to teaching and publicizing the divinity of the Lord. Isaac too, as soon as he was told, "Fear not, for I am with you," immediately "built an altar there and invoked the LORD by name" (26:24,25). He had come to a new place that had "never heard My fame nor beheld My glory" (Isa. 66:19). Nothing of this sort is written about Jacob, since he had many sons, all of whom served the Lord—the "community of Israel"—through whom the faith was publicized to every nation. And of course it had been publicized throughout Canaan already in his father's and grandfather's days.

9 Toward the Negeb. As Rashi points out, this alludes to the tribe of Judah. Indeed, the first instruction in the book of Judges is, "Let [the tribe of] Judah go up. I now deliver the land into their hands" (Judg. 1:2).

10 There was a famine in the land. Abraham went down to Egypt because of the famine, to keep body and soul together by residing there during the days of scarcity. But the Egyptians wronged him for no reason by taking his wife. The Holy One took revenge on their behalf by means of great plagues and brought them forth with livestock, silver, and gold; and Pharaoh had them ushered out of the country. By this means, the Holy One hinted to Abraham that his descendants would go down to reside in the land of Egypt because of

[F] See Nahmanides' comment to Lev. 1:9.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **8 His tent.** The suffix is spelled unusually with ה, rather than with ו, only in Genesis—see also 9:21, 13:3, and 35:21 (Masorah). **With Bethel on the west and Ai on the east.** That being the place most fitted to receive the divine overflow and therefore the most likely place in which to achieve that closeness to the divine through which the Holy One hears the prayers of human beings. As we see from 28:17, some places are better suited for this than others (Gersonides). This location between two big cities would maximize the number of people whom he could teach about the Lord (Sforno).

9 Toward the Negeb. The Hebrew phrase occurs nowhere else but in 13:1 (Masorah). He had to move to graze the livestock, but he did not go east or west, wanting to remain equidistant between Bethel and Ai (Sforno).

10 Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there. He presumed that he had been commanded to settle in Canaan, not that he was restricted from leaving it for business or other purposes (Abarbanel).

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NJPS there, for the famine was severe in the land. [11]As he was about to enter Egypt, he said to his wife Sarai, "I know what a beautiful woman you are. [12]If the Egyptians see you, and think, 'She is his wife,' they will kill me and let

לָגוּר שָׁם כִּי־כָבֵד הָרָעָב בָּאָרֶץ׃ 11 וַיְהִי כַּאֲשֶׁר הִקְרִיב לָבוֹא מִצְרַיְמָה וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל־שָׂרַי אִשְׁתּוֹ הִנֵּה־נָא יָדַעְתִּי כִּי אִשָּׁה יְפַת־מַרְאֶה אָתְּ׃ 12 וְהָיָה כִּי־יִרְאוּ אֹתָךְ הַמִּצְרִים וְאָמְרוּ אִשְׁתּוֹ זֹאת וְהָרְגוּ אֹתִי

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Even if the Egyptians would kill Abraham to take Sarah (v. 12), isn't it shameful to choose life by pimping your wife? ✦ It is obvious that Abraham might worry they would kill him; but why worry in addition that "they will . . . let you live"?

OJPS sojourn there; for the famine was sore in the land. [11]And it came to pass, when he was come near to enter into Egypt, that he said unto Sarai his wife: "Behold now, I know that thou art a fair woman to look upon. [12]And it will come to pass, when the Egyptians shall see thee, that they will say: This is his wife; and they will kill me, but thee they

RASHBAM **11 I know**. "Behold now" of OJPS really means something like "here is my request." When this Hebrew word *na* is repeated, the first usage introduces the reason for the request; the second (here, "please" of v. 13) marks the request itself. **[C]**

[C] See Rashbam's comment to 27:3.

RASHI second thoughts about the Holy One's telling him to go to Canaan, now that He was enticing him to leave it.

11 I know. Rather, *now* I know (see OJPS). A midrash: Until now, he had no idea what she looked like, so modestly did the two of them behave with each other. Now, circumstances caused him to see her. Another reading: ordinarily people are somewhat disheveled by traveling, but Sarah looked as beautiful as she always did. But the straightforward sense is simply this: "The time has now come when we must worry about your beauty. I have known for a long time how beautiful you are, but now we are coming among dark, ugly men, near relatives to the Ethiopians, who are not used to seeing beautiful women." For a similar use of "now," see "Please, my lords, turn aside now to your servant's house" (19:2).

IBN EZRA **11 As he was about to enter**. Again, the Hebrew verb is Hiphil and would seem to be transitive: he was about to bring his camp into Egypt. But the translations could be correct, since there are verbs that can be either transitive or intransitive. **He said to his wife Sarai**. NJPS omits his first two words: "Behold now" (OJPS). "Now" is *na* in Hebrew but the reverse in Arabic! **I know what a beautiful woman you are**. "*Now* I know." For in her own land there were others as beautiful as she, but in Egypt and the Negeb there were not. Complexions change with the climate.

12 And let you live. Rather, "they will keep [you] alive" (OJPS). They will give you everything you need. (Remember that there was a famine at the time.)

KIMHI animals, and people as well, to stay in Canaan during a famine. **To sojourn there**. Until the famine in Canaan was over.

11 As he was about to enter Egypt. Rather, "to bring [his camp] into Egypt." He had to move slowly so that the animals could be taken care of and the children could keep up. **I know what a beautiful woman you are**. Though the Hebrew does indeed say "now" (OJPS), it does not mean that he did not know it previously; he knew it the day he met her. Rather, it is a word that introduces a topic: "Behold now, my lords, turn aside, I pray you" (19:2); "behold now, your servant has found favor in your sight" (19:18); and so forth.

12 If the Egyptians see you. Egyptians are not as good-looking as Canaanites; for one thing, they are southerners; for another, they are steeped in immorality. It was only when Abraham got there and saw how ugly they were that he feared they would desire his wife. If he had known that, he would never have gone there in the first place, but would have endured the famine rather than turning his wife loose. It is not that he was afraid they would take her from him over and over again. It might happen once, but not multiple times; no people anywhere on earth could put up with such conduct. But it would take just one act of violence to kill him, after which she would be unmarried and available to them without the need for violence. That is what Abraham was afraid of. He did not rely on God's promise, fearing that he had sinned. Jacob behaved the same way. No one, no matter how righteous, should rely on a miracle when he is in a dangerous situation. He should protect himself any way he can. As Solomon said, "Happy is the man who is anxious always" (Prov. 28:14). Samuel told the Holy One directly: "How can I go? If Saul hears of it, he will kill me." The Holy One did not rebuke him but gave him a plan: "Take a heifer with you, and say, 'I have come to sacrifice to the LORD'" (1 Sam. 16:2). Every righteous person should act this way, and not rely on a miracle. **And let you live**. You are so beautiful that they will spare you for their own pleasure. — For the verb, compare "You have *spared* every female!" (Num. 31:15); "you are the one I should have killed, while *sparing* her" (Num. 22:33).

NAHMANIDES famine; that the Egyptians would treat them poorly and take their wives, as we see from "let every girl live" (Exod. 1:22); that the Holy One would eventually take revenge on their behalf by means of great plagues; that eventually the Egyptians would send them forth with silver and gold and "very much livestock, both flocks and herds" (Exod. 12:38) and would even be "impatient to have them leave the country" (Exod. 12:33). There was not a single thing that happened to the ancestor that did not happen to the descendants as well. The whole comparison is found in Genesis Rabbah. You should know, however, that our father Abraham sinned greatly (if inadvertently) by putting a stumbling block of transgression before his righteous wife out of fear that they might kill him. He ought to have trusted in the Holy One to save him and his wife and all that they had. For God has the power to help and to save. Even leaving the land he had been commanded to go to, just because there was a famine, was sinful, for "in famine He will redeem you from death" (Job 5:20). In fact, this is the reason his descendants were condemned to be exiled to Egypt, under the control of Pharaoh: "Alongside righteousness there is wickedness" (Eccles. 3:16) and sin.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **11 As he was about to enter Egypt**. The world capital of sexual immorality (Sforno). **I know what a beautiful woman you are**. The sense is, "I know that you are such a beautiful woman that when the Egyptians see you" and so forth (Bekhor Shor). Notice that he does *not* called her "shapely and beautiful," like Rachel in 29:17; the Egyptian women were not "fair" but that did not stop them from being shapely (Abarbanel). He told her this only close to when it was necessary, not wanting her to forget (Sforno).

12 If the Egyptians see you. The Egyptians were steeped in immorality not merely because of their culture but because of climate as well; that country is extremely hot (Gersonides).

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NJPS you live. 13Please say that you are my sister, that it may go well with me because of you, and that I may remain alive thanks to you."

14When Abram entered Egypt, the Egyptians saw how very beautiful the woman was. 15Pharaoh's courtiers saw her and praised her to Pharaoh, and the woman was

OJPS will keep alive. 13Say, I pray thee, thou art my sister; that it may be well with me for thy sake, and that my soul may live because of thee."

14And it came to pass, that, when Abram was come into Egypt, the Egyptians beheld the woman that she was very fair. 15And the princes of Pharaoh saw her, and praised her to Pharaoh; and the woman was taken

וְאֹתָךְ יְחַיּוּ׃ 13 אִמְרִי־נָא אֲחֹתִי אָתְּ לְמַעַן
יִיטַב־לִי בַעֲבוּרֵךְ וְחָיְתָה נַפְשִׁי בִּגְלָלֵךְ׃
14 וַיְהִי כְּבוֹא אַבְרָם מִצְרַיְמָה וַיִּרְאוּ
הַמִּצְרִים אֶת־הָאִשָּׁה כִּי־יָפָה הִוא מְאֹד׃
15 וַיִּרְאוּ אֹתָהּ שָׂרֵי פַרְעֹה וַיְהַלְלוּ אֹתָהּ
אֶל־פַּרְעֹה וַתֻּקַּח הָאִשָּׁה בֵּית פַּרְעֹה׃

RASHI **13 That it may go well with me because of you.** They will give me gifts.

14 When Abram entered Egypt. We expect it to say "when *they* entered Egypt." We learn that Abraham hid Sarah in a trunk. But when he went through customs, they opened it and saw her.

15 And praised her to Pharaoh. More precisely, "for" Pharaoh. They praised her among themselves, saying, "This one is fit for a king!"

KIMHI **13 Please say.** If anyone asks you. **And that I may remain alive.** Rather, "*in that* I may remain alive." This is what he meant by things "going well" with him. Despite v. 16, Abraham was looking for nothing more than not being killed. God forbid that he should profit by her disgrace, for her disgrace was his.

15 The woman was taken into Pharaoh's palace. Against her will, unlike Esther, who was single.

NAHMANIDES **13 Please say that you are my sister.** I don't know why he was so afraid of this now more than previously. Rashi says that the Egyptians were dark and ugly, but in fact Abraham said the same thing to King Abimelech of Gerar, and Isaac, who stayed in that land at God's command, did so too. **[G]** Perhaps the Canaanites of that generation, though steeped in idolatry, refrained from sexual immorality more than the Egyptians and the Philistines? That cannot be right. I suppose Abraham and Sarah might not have had this fear except when they entered a capital city, since it was common to bring beautiful women to the king and arrange to have their husbands killed. But I think Abraham and Sarah must have acted this way ever since they left Haran; he said, "She is my sister," everywhere they went, as Abraham indeed says in 20:13. The text mentions it only when something came of it. So in our verse Abraham was simply reminding her. Isaac was not afraid in his own city or indeed his own land; only when he came to Philistia did he follow his father's practice. **That it may go well with me because of you, and that I may remain alive thanks to you.** As long as we have to live in this land, until the famine is over. — For Abraham only came down to live there because of the famine. Once the famine was over, he would return to the land he had been commanded to go to, which the Holy One had given to him and his offspring. He assumed that if they could keep body and soul together as long as the famine lasted, relief and deliverance would come to them from God, permitting them to return. At worst, the Egyptians would give up on Sarah and he and she would be able to flee back to Canaan. Rashi's comment to v. 11 about their modesty—a midrashic tradition attached to this text—is not really necessary. The word *na* does not mean that some situation has arisen *only* "now," merely that it is now in effect: "Look *now*, the LORD has kept me from bearing" (16:2), from my youth up to this day. When Lot says, "Look *now*, I have two daughters" (19:8), they had not just been born. And the same goes for the rest of them. From the straightforward sense of the text, it appears that Sarah did not agree to say this. But the Egyptians were extremely evil; they took her to Pharaoh's palace without bothering to ask whether she was his wife or his sister, and she kept her mouth shut. It was Abraham who volunteered that she was his sister, and that is why "it went well" with him (v. 15). In v. 18 Pharaoh accuses Abraham of misleading him; when they took her, he should have told them she was his wife. Pharaoh did not accuse Sarah of anything; it was not her place to contradict her husband, just to keep silent.

15 Pharaoh's courtiers saw her. The Egyptians who saw her said, "She looks as if she ought to be a nobleman's wife," and they brought her to the courtiers. But even they feared for their lives too much to lay a hand on her. They knew that, with her great beauty, the king would very much desire her. **And praised her to Pharaoh.** See Rashi's comment. Onkelos too has her being praised as worthy "of" Pharaoh. **[H]** But "to Pharaoh" is also a possible meaning of the Hebrew.

[G] See chs. 20 and 26. **[H]** Our version of Onkelos does not say this.

RASHBAM **13 Please say that you are my sister, that it may go well with me because of you.** Since you must anyway tell them (to save my life) that you are not my wife, tell them something that will do me some good. — It was the custom to give presents to the woman's relatives: "he gave presents to her brother and her mother" (24:53); "ask of me a bride-price ever so high, as well as gifts" (34:12).

IBN EZRA **13 You are my sister.** The accent on the Hebrew word for "sister" has moved away from the final syllable because the immediately following syllable in the next word is accented. This shift is standard; compare "He called Night" (1:5). As for the double *tt* of *att* ("you"), the first *t* is an assimilated *n*. The "you" words (*attah* and *att*) are related, after all, to "I" (*ani*). **That it may go well with me.** "It" refers here to a gift. And indeed "he dealt well" (v. 16), using the Hiphil form; our verb is Qal. **Thanks to you.** This and the preceding "because of you" are compound prepositions, which always begin with a ב. The so-called "poets" who omit the ב put themselves in the wrong.

15 Praised her. The first ל of the verb should have a *dagesh*, but it is omitted here (as in "I prayed" of Dan. 9:4) to make the verb easier to pronounce. **The woman was taken.** The verb is Hophal, the passive of Hiphil (though this root is never found in Hiphil). **[F]**

[F] We now understand these forms to be Qal Passive.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **13 Please say that you are my sister.** The latter phrase also occurs only in "Say to Wisdom, 'You are my sister'" of Prov. 7:4 (Masorah). If you say we are not related, you will certainly save my life, but things will not go well with me (Bekhor Shor). Abraham's plan was, if they asked whether she was married, to tell them her husband was traveling far away. They would understand that they could not kill her husband, and they would leave her alone (Hizkuni). **That it may go well with me because of you.** They will outdo themselves in bidding up the bride price for you — as was the custom in those days (Sforno).

14 When Abram entered Egypt. As in v. 10, "Abram" stands in here for himself and all who accompanied him, since they were all his dependents (Hizkuni).

15 The woman was taken into Pharaoh's palace. Into his palace, not into his bed. And note that he did not run a check on her;

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NJPS taken into Pharaoh's palace. [16]And because of her, it went well with Abram; he acquired sheep, oxen, asses, male and female slaves, she-asses, and camels.

[17]But the LORD afflicted Pharaoh and his household with mighty plagues on account of Sarai, the wife of Abram. [18]Pharaoh sent for Abram and said, "What is this you have done to me! Why did you not tell me that she was your wife? [19]Why did you say, 'She is my sister,' so that I took her as

OJPS into Pharaoh's house. [16]And he dealt well with Abram for her sake; and he had sheep, and oxen, and he-asses, and men-servants, and maid-servants, and she-asses, and camels.

[17]And the LORD plagued Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai Abram's wife. [18]And Pharaoh called Abram, and said: "What is this that thou hast done unto me? why didst thou not tell me that she was thy wife? [19]Why saidst thou: She is my sister? so that I took her to

16 וּלְאַבְרָם הֵיטִיב בַּעֲבוּרָהּ וַיְהִי־לוֹ צֹאן־
וּבָקָר וַחֲמֹרִים וַעֲבָדִים וּשְׁפָחֹת וַאֲתֹנֹת
וּגְמַלִּים׃
17 וַיְנַגַּע יְהוָה ׀ אֶת־פַּרְעֹה נְגָעִים גְּדֹלִים
וְאֶת־בֵּיתוֹ עַל־דְּבַר שָׂרַי אֵשֶׁת אַבְרָם׃
18 וַיִּקְרָא פַרְעֹה לְאַבְרָם וַיֹּאמֶר מַה־זֹּאת
עָשִׂיתָ לִּי לָמָּה לֹא־הִגַּדְתָּ לִּי כִּי אִשְׁתְּךָ
הִוא׃ 19 לָמָּה אָמַרְתָּ אֲחֹתִי הִוא וָאֶקַּח

RASHI **16 And because of her, it went well with Abram.** Rather, "he," Pharaoh, "dealt well with Abram for her sake." He gave him gifts.

17 But the LORD afflicted Pharaoh. With a kind of skin disease that made sex painful for him (Genesis Rabbah). **And his household.** The straightforward sense is that this refers to the people of the household, but a midrash takes it to refer literally to his "house": walls, pillars, furniture, and all. **[E] On account of Sarai.** The Hebrew can be read as "by the word of Sarai." She would tell the angel, "Smite!" and he would smite.

19 Take her and begone! Contrast Abimelech, who in a similar situation said, "Here, my land is before you; settle wherever you please" (20:15). But Pharaoh said, "Begone and

[E] This comment is identified in our texts as "from an old version of Rashi." For a house being afflicted in this way, see Lev. 14:33–53.

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Pharaoh's first question, "Why did you not tell me that she was your wife?" (v. 18), makes it sound as if Abraham never spoke to him; yet his next question, "Why did you say, 'She is my sister'?" seems to contradict this. What really happened? ✦ Why did Pharaoh say "to me" in his first question, but not in his second? ✦ Why did Abraham not simply reply "I thought, surely there is no fear of God in this place" as he does later in 20:11?

IBN EZRA **17 On account of Sarai.** More literally, "on account of [this] matter of Sarai."

18 Tell me. Another verb with a hidden נ.

19 So that I took her as my wife. For she "was taken into Pharaoh's palace" (v. 15) to be his wife, for him to sleep with her. But the Holy One afflicted him with plagues so that he could not touch her. The Holy One sent these plagues on him to defend His friend's wife, and they were so great that he was simply unable to touch her. We find "taking" meaning "taking to wife" in "you desire her and would take her to wife" (Deut. 21:10); the fact that "possess her" follows only in Deut. 21:13 makes this quite clear.

KIMHI **16 It went well with Abram; he acquired sheep, oxen, asses, male and female slaves, she-asses, and camels.** He would not have accepted them but he was afraid to turn them down. Note that from the king of Sodom he accepted nothing. **[B]** He was quite content with the great wealth God had already given him.

17 But the LORD afflicted Pharaoh. That very night, so that he could not touch her. **And his household.** The men of his household, that is, the courtiers who had praised her. Or perhaps it really means everyone in the household, men and women alike, so that they would realize it was "the finger of God" (Exod. 8:15). **On account of Sarai.** They should not think it was a coincidence. A midrash actually says that the angel who was smiting them would say, "This is on account of Sarai, the wife of Abram." But the straightforward sense is simply that Pharaoh began to wonder whether she might be someone's wife after all; so he asked her to tell him the truth. That is why he "sent for Abram" (v. 18).

19 So that I took her as my wife. I did not take her just for promiscuous sex. **Here is your wife.** Just as she was; I did not touch her. **Take her and begone!** Don't stay in this town; she is so beautiful that someone else might try to take her. — Abram said nothing. This

[B] See 14:22–24.

NAHMANIDES **17 But the LORD afflicted Pharaoh and his household with mighty plagues on account of Sarai, the wife of Abram.** Both names are mentioned because the violence done to her injured Abraham as well; the "mighty plagues" were on account of them both, and due to their merit.

18 Pharaoh sent for Abram. Perhaps because the plagues coincided with Sarah's arrival he asked her and she told him she was Abraham's wife. Or perhaps, as our tradition says, he was afflicted with a disease that made intercourse painful for him, which made him suspect that she was Abraham's wife. **What is this you have done to me! Why did you not tell me that she was your wife?** He was trying to get the truth out of Abraham and wanted to see what he would reply to the accusation. If she were his sister, he would insist, "She really is my sister!" But even when Pharaoh said, "Here is your wife" (v. 19), Abraham was so frightened that he kept silent and did not say a word. Then Pharaoh understood that his suspicion was correct.

19 I took her as my wife. It was indeed his intention to make her the queen, not just another concubine. Again, as I explained in my previous comment, this was to find out whether she really was Abraham's sister.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS he heard from the courtiers that Abram had said, "She is my sister" (Bekhor Shor). They did not bother to negotiate a bride-price; it was understood that no one would turn down the king (Sforno).

16 It went well with Abram. The translation of OJPS is more literal—but it makes a critical mistake: "He [not Pharaoh but the Holy One] dealt well with Abram" (Abarbanel).

17 But the LORD afflicted Pharaoh and his household with mighty plagues on account of Sarai, the wife of Abram. We are not explicitly told, as we are of Abimelech in 20:4, that Pharaoh "had not approached her" before this happened, but obviously the Lord was capable of afflicting him before he touched her and for Abram's sake would certainly have done so (Gersonides). More precisely, "the LORD afflicted Pharaoh with mighty plagues, and his household" with lesser ones (Sforno).

19 Why did you say, "She is my sister"? He does not complain about her saying, "He is my brother," as Abimelech does in 20:5. She was still underage at this point, so her words are attributed to Abraham (Hizkuni). Kings take only virgins as their wives

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NJPS my wife? Now, here is your wife; take her and begone!" [20]And Pharaoh put men in charge of him, and they sent him off with his wife and all that he possessed.

13 From Egypt, Abram went up into the Negeb, with his wife and all that he possessed, together with Lot. [2]Now Abram was very rich in cattle, silver, and gold. [3]And he proceeded by stages from the Negeb as far as Bethel, to the place where his tent had been formerly, between Bethel and Ai, [4]the site of the altar that he had built there at first; and there Abram invoked the LORD by name.

[5]Lot, who went with Abram, also had

אֹתָהּ לִי לְאִשָּׁה וְעַתָּה הִנֵּה אִשְׁתְּךָ קַח וָלֵךְ׃ 20 וַיְצַו עָלָיו פַּרְעֹה אֲנָשִׁים וַיְשַׁלְּחוּ אֹתוֹ וְאֶת־אִשְׁתּוֹ וְאֶת־כָּל־אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ׃

יג וַיַּעַל אַבְרָם מִמִּצְרַיִם הוּא וְאִשְׁתּוֹ וְכָל־אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ וְלוֹט עִמּוֹ הַנֶּגְבָּה׃ 2 וְאַבְרָם כָּבֵד מְאֹד בַּמִּקְנֶה בַּכֶּסֶף וּבַזָּהָב׃ 3 וַיֵּלֶךְ לְמַסָּעָיו מִנֶּגֶב וְעַד־בֵּית־אֵל עַד־הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר־הָיָה שָׁם אהלה אָהֳלֹה בַּתְּחִלָּה בֵּין בֵּית־אֵל וּבֵין הָעָי׃ 4 אֶל־מְקוֹם הַמִּזְבֵּחַ אֲשֶׁר־עָשָׂה שָׁם בָּרִאשֹׁנָה וַיִּקְרָא שָׁם אַבְרָם בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה׃ שלישי 5 וְגַם־לְלוֹט הַהֹלֵךְ אֶת־אַבְרָם הָיָה צֹאן־

OJPS be my wife; now therefore behold thy wife, take her, and go thy way." [20]And Pharaoh gave men charge concerning him; and they brought him on the way, and his wife, and all that he had.

13 And Abram went up out of Egypt, he, and his wife, and all that he had, and Lot with him, into the South. [2]And Abram was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold. [3]And he went on his journeys from the South even to Beth-el, unto the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Beth-el and Ai; [4]unto the place of the altar, which he had made there at the first; and Abram called there on the name of the LORD.

[5]And Lot also, who went with Abram,

RASHI do not tarry!" He knew that all the Egyptians were steeped in perversion: "Their organs were like those of stallions" (Ezek. 23:20).

20 Pharaoh put men in charge of him. To escort him and protect him. **They sent him off.** Rather, as Onkelos translates, "They accompanied him."

13:1 From Egypt, Abram went up into the Negeb. The same Hebrew phrase translated here as "into the Negeb" means "southward" in 12:9; from Egypt, of course, going toward the south of Israel implies a northward journey. For Egypt is south of Israel, as we see from Numbers 33–34.

2 Very rich. Rather, "very heavy," that is, heavily laden with goods.

3 And he proceeded by stages. Literally, "his" stages (see OJPS). When he returned from Egypt to Canaan, he would stay at the same inns where he stayed on the journey to Egypt. He teaches us a good rule of behavior: one should not change one's customary inn. Another reading: he paid all his bills on the way home. **From the Negeb.** Rather, "from the south" (compare OJPS). Remember that Egypt is south of Canaan.

4 That he had built there at first. And where he had **invoked the LORD by name**—which he presumably did again now as well.

5 Lot, who went with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents. What caused Lot to have all these? His going with Abram.

KIMHI was not a conversation, such as he would have with Abimelech. **[C]** He was being forced out.

20 Pharaoh put men in charge of him. To guard his wife and his possessions. **They sent him off.** They went with him as far as the border.

13:1 All that he possessed. Not one thing was missing. **Together with Lot.** Despite the abundance in Egypt, he did not wish to part from Abraham.

4 The site of the altar that he had built there at first. One should establish a permanent place for prayer; the mind focuses more easily in one's regular spot. **There Abram invoked the LORD by name.** A second time; see 12:8.

5 Lot, who went with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents. As a result of his association with Abram. He needed many tents for his many possessions and the many members of his household.

[C] See ch. 20.

RASHBAM 13:5 Lot, who went with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents. Those who have herds also have tents; the herdsmen must move from places where the pasturage has been overgrazed to other places where there is grass.

IBN EZRA 20 Pharaoh put men in charge of him. Rather, "gave men charge concerning him." He ordered them to announce that no one should touch the man or his wife. **They sent him off.** Rather, "they brought him on the way" (OJPS), accompanying him out of respect, just like Abraham walking with the men "to see them off" (18:16).

13:1 Abram went up. For the morphology of this verb, see my *Basic Hebrew Grammar.* **[G]**

2 Abram was very rich. Literally, "very heavy," since one with a large amount of possessions is weighed down by them and cannot travel fast. Note too that in Hebrew "respect" etymologically implies being treated "heavily," as "disrespect" means being treated "lightly." **In cattle, silver, and gold.** Which would indeed have weighed a lot.

3 By stages. It took a great many stages to get from the south back to Bethel, which is in the north.

4 The site of the altar that he had built there at first. To give thanks to the Lord that he had returned in peace.

5 Tents. Note the unusual vowel after the א; compare the same word in Jer. 35:7. The singular of that form is (the standard) *óhel*; the singular form of the plural in our verse, *ohál*, does not occur in the Bible.

[G] *Sefer ha-Yesod.*

NAHMANIDES 13:1 With his wife and all that he possessed. They did not seize from him a single one of the great gifts they had given him to have Sarah belong to the king. They did not say, "You cheated us, and the gifts were a mistake." This was indeed miraculous.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS (Abarbanel). You might have feared the masses, but as Prov. 29:4 says, "a king sustains the land by justice" (Sforno). **Take her and begone!** If you remain in Egypt, people will be saying all day long, "She used to be the king's wife, and now she is married to this ordinary man" (Abarbanel).

13:3 He proceeded by stages. A faster pace would have endangered the livestock (Gersonides).

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NJPS flocks and herds and tents, [6]so that the land could not support them staying together; for their possessions were so great that they could not remain together. [7]And there was quarreling between the herdsmen of Abram's cattle and those of Lot's cattle.—The Canaanites and Perizzites were then dwelling in the land.—[8]Abram said to Lot, "Let there be no strife between you and me, between my herdsmen and yours, for we are kinsmen. [9]Is not the whole land before you? Let us separate: if you go north, I will go south; and if you

וּבָקָר וְאֹהָלִים׃ [6] וְלֹא־נָשָׂא אֹתָם הָאָרֶץ
לָשֶׁבֶת יַחְדָּו כִּי־הָיָה רְכוּשָׁם רָב וְלֹא
יָכְלוּ לָשֶׁבֶת יַחְדָּו׃ [7] וַיְהִי־רִיב בֵּין רֹעֵי
מִקְנֵה־אַבְרָם וּבֵין רֹעֵי מִקְנֵה־לוֹט
וְהַכְּנַעֲנִי וְהַפְּרִזִּי אָז יֹשֵׁב בָּאָרֶץ׃ [8] וַיֹּאמֶר
אַבְרָם אֶל־לוֹט אַל־נָא תְהִי מְרִיבָה בֵּינִי
וּבֵינֶיךָ וּבֵין רֹעַי וּבֵין רֹעֶיךָ כִּי־אֲנָשִׁים
אַחִים אֲנָחְנוּ׃ [9] הֲלֹא כָל־הָאָרֶץ לְפָנֶיךָ
הִפָּרֶד נָא מֵעָלָי אִם־הַשְּׂמֹאל וְאֵימְנָה

OJPS had flocks, and herds, and tents. [6]And the land was not able to bear them, that they might dwell together; for their substance was great, so that they could not dwell together. [7]And there was a strife between the herdmen of Abram's cattle and the herdmen of Lot's cattle. And the Canaanite and the Perizzite dwelt then in the land. [8]And Abram said unto Lot: "Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen; for we are brethren. [9]Is not the whole land before thee? separate thyself, I pray thee, from me; if thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if

RASHI **6 The land could not support them.** There was not enough pasture for their livestock. Our text is short for "the [pasturage of the] land could not support them." This explains the use of the masculine verb, matching "pasturage" rather than the feminine "land."

7 There was quarreling between the herdsmen of Abram's cattle and those of Lot's cattle. Lot's herdsmen were bad men, used to pasturing their animals in other people's fields. When Abram's herdsmen rebuked them for this larceny, they replied, "The land was given to Abram, but he has no heir. Lot, his nephew, will inherit his property. So it's not larceny." **The Canaanites and Perizzites were then dwelling in the land.** Abram, therefore, had not yet come into possession of it.

8 We are kinsmen. This is the implication of the idiom "we are brothers" (compare OJPS). But a midrash takes it to mean that there was a facial resemblance between them.

9 If you go north, I will go south. But wherever you settle, I will not go far from you; I will stand by you, to help and defend you. — And in fact Lot did end up needing him; see 14:14. **I will go north.** Note that both verbs are reflexive; the vowel under the א of "I will go south" differs because of the י that follows.

KIMHI **6 The land could not support them.** The usually feminine "land" can sometimes, as here, take a masculine verb, as in "the earth was shaken" (Isa. 9:18). **Staying together.** There was not enough pasturage for both of them and for the inhabitants of the land as well.

7 The Canaanites and Perizzites were then dwelling in the land. As for the Canaanites, see my second comment to 12:6. The Perizzites happened to inhabit the particular part of the country where Bethel and Ai were located.

8 Let there be no strife between you and me, between my herdsmen and yours. If there is strife between our herdsmen, there is sure to be strife between the two of us as well.

9 Is not the whole land before you? Just as it is before me. No one would dare try to kill you or do you any harm whatsoever, for God's help will be with you, for my sake, and because you followed me in acknowledging the Creator. **Let us separate.** Rather, "separate yourself . . . from me" (compare OJPS). You are only here because of me, and you are secondary to me, so you should separate yourself from me rather than I from you. Besides, I am generous by nature, and all the more so with a relative, to let you choose. **If you go north, I will**

IBN EZRA **6 Together.** This word *yaḥdav* can be used for two who are together or for even a larger group. And it does not simply mean that they are in the same place (as *yaḥad* does) but they are "together" as a single unit: "all the people answered *as one*" (Exod. 19:8). The form of the word, though, is quite strange.

7 The Canaanites and Perizzites were then dwelling in the land. See my comment to "the Canaanites were then in the land" (12:6). It could be that "Perizzites" is simply a different name for one of the Canaanite nations named in 10:15–18, like the two names of Samuel's first-born or his great-grandfather. **[H]**

9 I will go south. Literally, "to the right." **I will go north.** Literally, "to the left." **[I]** We do not know whether the second א of this verb is part of the root or not, since it is missing in "turn left" of Ezek. 21:21.

[H] Samuel's first-born is called Joel in 1 Sam. 8:2 and Vashni in 1 Chron. 6:13; his great-grandfather is called Elihu in 1 Sam. 1:1 and Eliab in 1 Chron. 6:12. **[I]** East is "up" in Biblical Hebrew; the south is to the right and the north is to the left.

NAHMANIDES **7 There was quarreling.** Rashi's comment is a midrash, and one that surprises me. This gift was promised to Abram's offspring: "I will assign this land to your offspring" (as 12:7 should really be translated). How did Lot expect to come into possession of it? But the herdsmen misunderstood. **The Canaanites and Perizzites were then dwelling in the land.** The text is telling us that it did not yet belong either to Lot or to Abram, which is why "the land could not support them staying together" (v. 6) and Lot's herdsmen found themselves forced to graze their animals in fields belonging to others. That was the reason for the quarrel. But the straightforward sense is that there was not enough pasturage for them both. Abram's animals would graze among the reeds, but Lot's herdsmen would encroach on their territory. Remember that both Abram and Lot were merely residents in the land; Abram was afraid that the Canaanites and Perizzites would hear how much livestock they had and expel them, or simply attack them and take their livestock and their goods. For they were the ones entitled to be settled in the land at that time, not Abram. The text is reminding us that there were many other nations in the land at that time, with countless populations of both people and animals. The land could not support them and Abram and Lot. As for "then," it seems to me that the people living there then were tent dwellers. Some of them would move to a particular city and graze the animals there for a year or two, after which they would move to another region that had not been overgrazed. This has always been the custom of the Easterners. The Canaanites and Perizzites were in the region of the Negeb then; later on the Jebusites and Amorites would come there too.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **8 Let there be no strife between you and me . . . for we are kinsmen.** It would look bad to the others, who would say, "They cannot even get along with each other—how will such wicked people act toward us?" (Bekhor Shor).

9 Let us separate. Rather, "separate from me" (compare OJPS). Abram did not want to leave that special place (Gersonides). **I will go south.** Literally, "I will go to the right" (OJPS)—I will be at your right hand in case you need my help (Bekhor Shor). Abram was not saying that he himself would depart, but that he would move his livestock in the opposite direction to the one that Lot chose (Gersonides).

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NJPS go south, I will go north." [10]Lot looked about him and saw how well watered was the whole plain of the Jordan, all of it—this was before the LORD had destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah—all the way to Zoar, like the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt. [11]So Lot chose for himself the whole plain of the Jordan, and Lot journeyed eastward. Thus they parted from each other; [12]Abram remained in the land of Canaan, while Lot settled in the cities of the Plain,

וְאִם־הַיָּמִין וְאַשְׂמְאִילָה׃ [10] וַיִּשָּׂא־לוֹט
אֶת־עֵינָיו וַיַּרְא אֶת־כָּל־כִּכַּר הַיַּרְדֵּן כִּי
כֻלָּהּ מַשְׁקֶה לִפְנֵי ׀ שַׁחֵת יְהוָה אֶת־סְדֹם
וְאֶת־עֲמֹרָה כְּגַן־יְהוָה כְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם
בֹּאֲכָה צֹעַר׃ [11] וַיִּבְחַר־לוֹ לוֹט אֶת כָּל־
כִּכַּר הַיַּרְדֵּן וַיִּסַּע לוֹט מִקֶּדֶם וַיִּפָּרְדוּ אִישׁ
מֵעַל אָחִיו׃ [12] אַבְרָם יָשַׁב בְּאֶרֶץ־כְּנָעַן
וְלוֹט יָשַׁב בְּעָרֵי הַכִּכָּר וַיֶּאֱהַל עַד־סְדֹם׃

OJPS thou take the right hand, then I will go to the left." [10]And Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of the Jordan, that it was well watered every where, before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, like the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt, as thou goest unto Zoar. [11]So Lot chose him all the plain of the Jordan; and Lot journeyed east; and they separated themselves the one from the other. [12]Abram dwelt in the land of Canaan, and Lot dwelt in the cities of the Plain, and moved his

RASHI **10 Lot looked about him.** Literally, he "lifted up his eyes." The midrash takes this to imply that Lot chose to live in the area because of their loose morals. **[F] How well watered was the whole plain.** A "region of running brooks" (Deut. 10:7). **Before the LORD had destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.** When it was still a plain. **Like the garden of the LORD.** With regard to trees. **Like the land of Egypt.** With regard to seed plants.

11 Eastward. Rather, he journeyed "*from* the east," to the westward of Abram. And a midrash takes it to mean that he distanced himself "from the Ancient [One]." He thought, "I want nothing to do with Abram or his God."

12 Pitching his tents near Sodom. Tents for his herdsmen and livestock, which stretched as far as Sodom.

[F] Because the phrase sometimes introduces a sight of someone sexually attractive.

RASHBAM **12 Lot settled in the cities of the Plain, pitching his tents near Sodom.** This and the next verse are here to let us know why Abram reacts as he does when the invaders "also took Lot" (14:12) and also why "God was mindful of Abraham and removed Lot from the midst of the upheaval" (19:29).

IBN EZRA **10 How well watered.** Note the combination of genders in this phrase; compare "a fire fanned by no man will consume him" (Job 20:26). **The whole plain of the Jordan.** A fertile place. Either the כ is doubled here or it is missing in "broad pastures" of Isa. 30:23; for a similar phenomenon, compare "the *apple* of Your eye" (Ps. 17:8) with "the *pupil* of his own eye" (Zech. 2:12).

11 Lot journeyed eastward. Rather, "*from* the east." For Sodom is west of Bethel.

12 Pitching his tents. In Hebrew, a single word, a verb: "tenting."

KIMHI **go south; and if you go south, I will go north.** That is, "if you go north, I will remain here in the south; and if you choose to remain here in the south, I will go north."

10 Lot looked about him. Remember that this was in "the hill country" (12:8), so that he could see quite a long way. **The whole plain of the Jordan, all of it.** The repetition of "whole" and "all" (the same word in Hebrew) is used for emphasis, as in "*All* the kings of nations . . . *every* one" (Isa. 14:18). **Sodom and Gomorrah.** Which were near this plain. **All the way to Zoar.** Literally, "all *your* way" (compare OJPS). Despite what some think, this is a second-person suffix, not some strange ending. So, for that matter, is the ending of "the equivalent" in Leviticus 27: literally "*your* equivalent," referring to the priest responsible as "you." **Like the garden of the LORD.** The garden of Eden, which was watered by four rivers. **[D] Like the land of Egypt.** Watered by the Nile.

11 So Lot chose for himself the whole plain of the Jordan. Rather, he chose one of the places from "the whole plain of the Jordan," all of which were good. **Lot journeyed eastward.** The Jordan is on the east of Canaan. **Thus they parted from each other.** Since it was really Lot who parted from Abram (see my comment to "let us separate" in v. 9), how can the text say that "they parted from each other"? Rather, once Lot went his way, "they were separate from each other," with a long distance between them.

12 Lot settled in the cities of the Plain. For a while here and for a while there. **Pitching his tents near Sodom.** Rather, he "moved his tent" (OJPS) from place to place until eventually he settled in Sodom.

[D] See 2:10–14.

NAHMANIDES **10 Like the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt.** It was irrigated by bringing water directly from the Jordan, just as was done with the river that issued from Eden "to water the garden" (2:10), or like the land of Egypt, which "had to be watered by your own labors, like a vegetable garden" (Deut. 11:10). Both places are mentioned, the garden of the Lord because it was the best of the earthly lands, and Egypt because it was well known for pasturage. **[I]** The midrash that "the garden of the LORD" referred to trees and "the land of Egypt" to seed plants was intended to say that the plain of the Jordan had both great rivers to water the trees and many smaller channels to water vegetable gardens. That was why Lot chose it. Such a land is good for pasture and scarcity is something remote.

12 Abram remained in the land of Canaan. In all the rest of the land, not staying in one particular place. But Lot settled in one particular area in it: **In the cities of the Plain.** Which were also part of the land of Canaan. By Lot's settling in the "cities" of the Plain, the text means that he stayed now in one of them and now in another—again, because he had so much livestock. Choosing "the whole plain" for himself meant they agreed that Abram would not enter it at all.

[I] Another version of Nahmanides' comment, differing by a single Hebrew letter, says Egypt is mentioned "as proof, because it was well known."

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **10 This was before the LORD had destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.** Lot took care to examine the land, but not the people (Bekhor Shor).

11 Lot journeyed eastward. Rather, he journeyed "from the east" to the west—despite Abram's suggestion that they move north and south—because all the best pastureland was in that direction (Gersonides). **Thus they parted from each other.** It was such a radical separation that Deut. 23:4 says of Lot's descendants that "no Ammonite or Moabite shall be admitted into the congregation of the LORD . . . even in the tenth generation" (Hizkuni). Lot ought to have told him immediately, "You are my lord—settle the dispute as you will," or at least to have given Abraham his choice of where to go (Abarbanel).

12 Pitching his tents. This verb occurs only here and in v. 18 (Masorah). **Near Sodom.** But not in it, because they were such "wicked sinners" (v. 13). As 19:1 really tells us, "Lot was dwelling in the gate of Sodom," with his house in the wall and facing outward (Hizkuni).

NJPS pitching his tents near Sodom. 13Now the inhabitants of Sodom were very wicked sinners against the LORD.

14And the LORD said to Abram, after Lot had parted from him, "Raise your eyes and look out from where you are, to the north and south, to the east and west, 15for I give all the land that you see to you and your offspring forever. 16I will make your offspring as the dust of the earth, so that if one can count the dust of the earth, then your offspring too can be counted. 17Up, walk about the land, through its length

13 וְאַנְשֵׁי סְדֹם רָעִים וְחַטָּאִים לַיהוָה
מְאֹד׃
14 וַיהוָה אָמַר אֶל־אַבְרָם אַחֲרֵי הִפָּרֶד־
לוֹט מֵעִמּוֹ שָׂא נָא עֵינֶיךָ וּרְאֵה מִן־
הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר־אַתָּה שָׁם צָפֹנָה וָנֶגְבָּה
וָקֵדְמָה וְיָמָּה׃ 15 כִּי אֶת־כָּל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר־
אַתָּה רֹאֶה לְךָ אֶתְּנֶנָּה וּלְזַרְעֲךָ עַד־עוֹלָם׃
16 וְשַׂמְתִּי אֶת־זַרְעֲךָ כַּעֲפַר הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר
אִם־יוּכַל אִישׁ לִמְנוֹת אֶת־עֲפַר הָאָרֶץ
גַּם־זַרְעֲךָ יִמָּנֶה׃ 17 קוּם הִתְהַלֵּךְ בָּאָרֶץ

OJPS tent as far as Sodom. 13Now the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners against the LORD exceedingly.

14And the LORD said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from him: "Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art, northward and southward and eastward and westward; 15for all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever. 16And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth; so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered. 17Arise, walk through the land in the length of it

RASHI **13 Now the inhabitants of Sodom were very wicked sinners against the LORD.** And yet Lot did not hesitate to settle among them. Our Sages learned from this verse how to apply "the fame of the wicked rots" (Prov. 10:7). **[G]** They were "wicked" with their bodies, "sinners" with their money, and knew perfectly well who their Sovereign was, but deliberately rebelled "against the LORD."

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Is there anything more to the Holy One's promise to Abraham in vv. 15–16 of land and progeny than was already promised in 12:7? ✦ Why is this passage so much more extensive than that short phrase?

IBN EZRA **13 Very wicked.** To other people. Ezekiel explains: "Only this was the sin of your sister Sodom: arrogance! She and her daughters had plenty of bread and untroubled tranquillity; yet she did not support the poor and the needy" (Ezek. 16:49).

15 I give all the land that you see to you. That is, I promise to give it to you and your offspring.

14 And the LORD said to Abram, after Lot had parted from him. While that wicked man was with him, the divine utterance kept its distance.

16 So that if one can count the dust of the earth, then your offspring too can be counted. Since that is impossible, your offspring cannot be counted either.

[G] Whenever the wicked (like Sodom in v. 12) are mentioned, their wickedness should also be mentioned.

KIMHI **13 Now the inhabitants of Sodom were very wicked sinners against the LORD.** Lot's faith was so strong that this did not worry him. The place was so good that he settled there, but he did not take after their ways. As for the inhabitants of Sodom, they were "wicked and sinners" (OJPS), both against others and "against the LORD." For they violated the seven commandments given to Adam and to Noah (see my comment to "of every tree of the garden you are free to eat" in 2:16), among them idolatry, a sin against the Lord, and theft, sexual immorality, and the spilling of blood, which are crimes against other people but also sins against the Lord in that they are a violation of His commandments and a scorning of His word. They were "very" wicked in that they sinned publicly and became totally accustomed to doing so.

14 And the LORD said to Abram, after Lot had parted from him. The Lord had said this to Abram even before Lot parted from him, lest Abram suppose that Lot too would get a share of the land. That is why Abram said to him, "Is not the whole land before you?" (v. 9). Lot was his relative, after all, and had come with him to Canaan. Now, after Lot parted from him, God told him again, "Don't think anyone else will get a share of this land but you and your offspring—not even Lot." **To the north and south.** Putting north first just as Abram had done when he spoke to Lot. But Lot, as Abram's relative, would also get an inheritance: "I have assigned Ar as a possession to the descendants of Lot" (Deut. 2:9).

15 All the land that you see. He could not see all of it, of course, but He told him to look in all four directions, and everything as far as the border in all four directions would be given to him. It was the same when He told Moses to "view the land that I have given to the Israelite people" (Num. 27:12). Moses could not see it all, but it was as if he could. **Forever.** Even though they are exiled from it, they will eventually return to it.

16 I will make your offspring as the dust of the earth. This was hyperbole. **If one can count the dust of the earth, then your offspring too can be counted.** And if not, not. — Since the one is impossible, the other obviously is too. Like Jer. 13:23, it is rhetorical.

17 Through its length. From east to west. **And its breadth.** From north to south.

NAHMANIDES **13 Now the inhabitants of Sodom were very wicked sinners against the LORD.** As Rashi points out, this text is accusing Lot. It is, moreover, speaking in praise of Abram, whose portion did not fall in a place where there was evil. For "the scepter of the wicked shall never rest upon the land allotted to the righteous" (Ps. 125:3). All the cities of the Plain were extremely wicked sinners against the Lord (which is why they were annihilated), **[J]** even in comparison to the rest of the Canaanites, who Lev. 18:27 tells us were abhorrent.

15 To you and your offspring. For you to claim possession of it now (see my comment to v. 17) in order to pass it down as a possession to your offspring.

17 Up, walk about the land, through its length and its breadth. Conceivably this is simply giving him permission to do so: "Go where you like; I will be with you and protect you, for it is going to be yours." If he is actually being commanded to do this, then he is

[J] See 19:25.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **13 Very wicked sinners against the LORD.** They were sinners against the Lord and wicked even to each other (Gersonides).

15 I give all the land that you see. Since he had told Lot, "Is not the whole land before you?" (v. 9), as if reserving for himself only the spot where he lived, the Holy One made sure he did not take that approach (Bekhor Shor). **To you and your offspring forever.** It will take the entire land to provide as much as a handful of dust to each of your offspring (Bekhor Shor).

NJPS and its breadth, for I give it to you." [18]And Abram moved his tent, and came to dwell at the terebinths of Mamre, which are in Hebron; and he built an altar there to the LORD.

OJPS and in the breadth of it; for unto thee will I give it." [18]And Abram moved his tent, and came and dwelt by the terebinths of Mamre, which are in Hebron, and built there an altar unto the LORD.

14 Now, when King Amraphel of Shinar, King Arioch of Ellasar, King Chedorlaomer of Elam, and King Tidal of Goiim [2]made war on King Bera of Sodom, King Birsha of Gomorrah, King Shinab of Admah, King Shemeber of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela, which is Zoar, [3]all

לְאַרְכָּהּ וּלְרָחְבָּהּ כִּי לְךָ אֶתְּנֶנָּה׃ [18] וַיְאָהֶל אַבְרָם וַיָּבֹא וַיֵּשֶׁב בְּאֵלֹנֵי מַמְרֵא אֲשֶׁר בְּחֶבְרוֹן וַיִּבֶן־שָׁם מִזְבֵּחַ לַיהוָה׃ פ

רביעי

יד וַיְהִי בִּימֵי אַמְרָפֶל מֶלֶךְ־שִׁנְעָר אַרְיוֹךְ מֶלֶךְ אֶלָּסָר כְּדָרְלָעֹמֶר מֶלֶךְ עֵילָם וְתִדְעָל מֶלֶךְ גּוֹיִם׃ [2] עָשׂוּ מִלְחָמָה אֶת־בֶּרַע מֶלֶךְ סְדֹם וְאֶת־בִּרְשַׁע מֶלֶךְ עֲמֹרָה שִׁנְאָב | מֶלֶךְ אַדְמָה וְשֶׁמְאֵבֶר מֶלֶךְ צביים צְבוֹיִם וּמֶלֶךְ בֶּלַע הִיא־צֹעַר׃ [3] כָּל־אֵלֶּה

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ What is the point of telling us this story? Do we really need all the geopolitics in vv. 1–9? Couldn't we just have been told that Lot was taken captive?

14 And it came to pass in the days of Amraphel king of Shinar, Arioch king of Ellasar, Chedorlaomer king of Elam, and Tidal king of Goiim, [2]that they made war with Bera king of Sodom, and with Birsha king of Gomorrah, Shinab king of Admah, and Shemeber king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela—the same is Zoar. [3]All

RASHI **18 The terebinths of Mamre.** Mamre is a person's name.

14:1 Amraphel. This is Nimrod, who *amar "pul"*—who said (to Abram), "Jump [into the fiery furnace]!" **King Tidal of Goiim.** Though *goiim* means "nations," there is actually a place by that name, called so because people from a number of different nations and places gathered there and crowned a man named Tidal as king over them.

IBN EZRA **18 The terebinths of Mamre, which are in Hebron.** We are finally told where they were.

14:1 King Tidal of Goiim. Goiim must be the name of a country, like Elam. Otherwise this would have to mean "King Tidal of nations [unnamed]," different ones than Shinar and the others named previously.

2 Bera. The ב, second letter of the alphabet, indicates that he was *ra* ("evil") in two ways: to heaven and to people. **Birsha.** Here the ב indicates that he was raised to a double level of evil, *resha*. **Shinab.** He was *soné ab*, a hater of his Father in heaven. **Shemeber.** He *sam eber*, set his wing to fly against the Holy One in rebellion. **Bela.** That was just the name of the city.

KIMHI **18 And Abram moved his tent.** From place to place. **And came to dwell.** Eventually. **The terebinths of Mamre.** This is *not* the same as "the terebinth of Moreh" (12:6). That was a different plain (see my comment there), belonging to a man named Moreh; these are plains, in the plural, belonging to Mamre, "kinsman of Eshkol and Aner" (14:13). **In Hebron.** In the region of Hebron. **He built an altar there to the LORD.** Where he called people to worship the Lord. Wherever he stayed, he built an altar and called on people to worship the Lord.

14:1 Now, when King Amraphel. The reason this story is in the Torah is to record that Abram trusted God enough to pursue these four kings with so few men and to inform us that one should put oneself in danger if necessary to save one's relatives, just as our father Abraham did.

2 Made war. This tells the story of the particular battle they fought "at the Valley of Siddim" (v. 3), not the previous battles they had fought up until the four kings subjugated the five kings.

NAHMANIDES meant to go all around it, to claim possession of the gift, as I explained in my comments to 12:6. But he was not commanded to do this immediately. And he indeed did do it afterward. For now he was in the east, and later he went to Philistia, which is in the west. So he did fulfill this commandment during his lifetime. But the straightforward sense might well imply that he was to rule over the land as "the elect of God" (23:6) anywhere he might go in that land.

14:1 King Amraphel of Shinar. This episode happened to Abraham in order to demonstrate that four kingdoms would arise to rule the world, after which his descendants would overcome them and the kingdoms would all fall into their hands and would return all their captives and their possessions. The first of these kings was the king of Shinar, that is, Babylon, which would be first in the future as well. As Daniel told Nebuchadnezzar about his dream, "you are the head of gold" (Dan. 2:38). **King Arioch of Ellasar.** Ellasar may be the name of a city in Media or Persia. **King Chedorlaomer of Elam.** Elam was the name of the city where the first king of Greece ruled, from which his kingdom emerged once he defeated Darius, after which his dominion spread throughout the world (see B. Av. Zar. 10a). **King Tidal of Goiim.** He ruled over various nations (*goiim*), all of whom named him their leader, and therefore represents the king of Rome, who ruled a city composed of many nations—the Kittim, the Edomites, and others. As R. Abin says in Genesis Rabbah, it started with four kings and it will end with four.

2 The king of Bela. It was a small city, with few people, so his name was not known outside the city.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **18 And Abram moved his tent.** Here the same verb used in v. 12 does not mean "pitching" a tent, but dismantling it. Hebrew has many verbs that can have two such opposite meanings (Hizkuni). **And came to dwell at the terebinths of Mamre.** Where "the LORD appeared to him" in 18:1; it would seem that he settled down there, and that all the prophecies in these upcoming chapters occurred there (Gersonides).

14:2 Which is Zoar. Literally, "she is Zoar." This is one of only 11 times in the Torah that this pronoun is spelled normally, with a י, as opposed to a ו (Masorah).

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NJPS the latter joined forces at the Valley of Siddim, now the Dead Sea. 4Twelve years they served Chedorlaomer, and in the thirteenth year they rebelled. 5In the fourteenth year Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him came and defeated the Rephaim at Ashteroth-karnaim, the Zuzim at Ham, the Emim at Shaveh-kiriathaim, 6and the Horites in their hill country of Seir as far as El-paran, which is by the wilderness.

OJPS these came as allies unto the vale of Siddim—the same is the Salt Sea. 4Twelve years they served Chedorlaomer, and in the thirteenth year they rebelled. 5And in the fourteenth year came Chedorlaomer and the kings that were with him, and smote the Rephaim in Ashteroth-karnaim, and the Zuzim in Ham, and the Emim in Shaveh-kiriathaim, 6and the Horites in their mount Seir, unto El-paran, which is by the wilderness.

חָבְרוּ אֶל־עֵמֶק הַשִּׂדִּים הִוא יָם הַמֶּלַח׃
4 שְׁתֵּים עֶשְׂרֵה שָׁנָה עָבְדוּ אֶת־כְּדָרְלָעֹמֶר
וּשְׁלֹשׁ־עֶשְׂרֵה שָׁנָה מָרָדוּ׃ 5 וּבְאַרְבַּע
עֶשְׂרֵה שָׁנָה בָּא כְדָרְלָעֹמֶר וְהַמְּלָכִים
אֲשֶׁר אִתּוֹ וַיַּכּוּ אֶת־רְפָאִים בְּעַשְׁתְּרֹת
קַרְנַיִם וְאֶת־הַזּוּזִים בְּהָם וְאֵת הָאֵימִים
בְּשָׁוֵה קִרְיָתָיִם׃ 6 וְאֶת־הַחֹרִי בְּהַרְרָם
שֵׂעִיר עַד אֵיל פָּארָן אֲשֶׁר עַל־הַמִּדְבָּר׃

RASHI **3 Valley of Siddim.** So called because at the time it was filled with *saddot*, "fields." **Now the Dead Sea.** Eventually the sea filled it and it became the Dead Sea. A midrash says this happened when the cliffs surrounding it split open, letting great channels of water flow in.

4 Twelve years they served Chedorlaomer. "They," the five kings of v. 2.

5 In the fourteenth year. Of their rebellion. **Chedorlaomer.** Since the rebellion was against him, it was he who got into the thick of it. **And the kings who were with him.** The other three kings of v. 1. **The Zuzim.** These are the "Zamzummim" of Deut. 2:20.

6 In their hill country. More precisely, "in their mount Seir" (OJPS). **El-paran.** Rather, as Onkelos translates, "the plain of Paran." But I say that *eil* is not a word that means "plain"; Eil is the name of the plain of Paran, just as Eilonei ("terebinths" in the translations) is the name of the plain of Mamre in 13:18. Similarly Kikkar is the name of "the plain of the Jordan" in 13:10, Abel is the name of "the plain of Shittim" in Abel-shittim of Num. 33:49, and Baal is the name of "the plain of Gad" in Baal-gad of Josh. 11:17. Onkelos translates each of these as "plain," but each of them is really the name of that plain.

IBN EZRA **3 The Valley of Siddim.** That is, the Valley of Plaster (see Deut. 27:2). **Now the Dead Sea.** Rather, "now [the Valley of] the Dead Sea." The word is implicitly repeated here. Compare "O LORD, do not punish me in anger; [do not] chastise me in fury" (Ps. 6:2).

4 In the thirteenth year. "In" does not appear in the Hebrew, but that is the standard idiom; compare "*in* six days the LORD made heaven and earth and sea, and all that is in them" (Exod. 20:11). Seder Olam, however, understands it to mean that they rebelled *for* 13 years—and their understanding is broader than ours.

5 The Rephaim. So called because anyone who saw them would lose heart, thinking they were ghosts (which is what the Hebrew word means when it is not a name). **The Emim.** Who provoke *emah*, fear.

6 In their hill country. This is actually a Piel verb (for the form, compare "*as they spoke* to him" of 50:17). The correction translation is "when they went up to the mountain" of Seir. "Their" hill country is just wrong.

KIMHI **3 All the latter joined forces.** Rather, "all these joined forces," the four kings with the five. **At the Valley.** More precisely, "*in* the Valley," as the same Hebrew preposition is used in "*inside* the Ark" (Exod. 25:21). **Of Siddim.** Rather, as Onkelos translates, "of the fields." Note the *dagesh* in the ד; "field" can occur in two forms, שדה and שדד. For the latter, see the "final plowing" of Hosea 10:11. **Now the Dead Sea.** "Now" is not in the Hebrew. Either this valley was near the Dead Sea, or the valley itself afterward became the sea that we now call the Dead Sea.

4 Twelve years they served Chedorlaomer. Bringing tribute to him. Evidently Chedorlaomer was the leader of the other three kings. **And in the thirteenth year they rebelled.** They did not bring the tribute.

5 The Rephaim. The Titans. **At Ashteroth-karnaim.** This place is between two huge mountains; *karnaim* means "a pair of horns." (It is mentioned in rabbinic literature.) All the locations mentioned in this passage are near Sodom and Gomorrah and perhaps sided with them. That would explain why Chedorlaomer and his allies attacked them.

6 Their hill country. As OJPS recognizes (following Onkelos), this is from *herer*, a noun: "their mountain, Seir." If it were a Piel verb, as a few of the commentators think, the vowel under the ה would have to be a *qamatz*, not a *patah*. For the connection of the Horites with Seir, see 36:20.

NAHMANIDES **6 El-paran.** If this was a name, as Rashi and the translations think, Onkelos would have transliterated it, as was his custom with names. Who told Rashi that all these many places were plains and not hills? Mamre is most certainly the name of a person (see v. 13); see my comment to "at the terebinth of Moreh" (12:6). But El-paran was a place of *eilim*, "terebinths" (see the use of that word in Isa. 1:29), just as "Eilonei" Mamre was a place of oaks: "like the terebinth [*eilah*] and the oak [*allon*]" (Isa. 6:13; see Ezek. 27:6 as well). Such trees were indeed commonly planted in open ground outside the cities to provide parkland. Note that Onkelos translates "Allon-bacuth" (35:8) as "the *plain* of weeping." It is not a proper noun, just a reference to the oak that was planted in that plain; the verse says explicitly that Rebekah's nurse was buried "under the oak." (Onkelos wanted to convey the idea, not necessarily the precise words.) **[K]** In "the plain of the Jordan," however, that is the standard Hebrew word for a plain with rivers running through it. Note that the Hebrew word is sometimes spelled with a double ב, as in 13:10–11, and sometimes with just one, as in Isa. 30:23, Ps. 65:14, and many other cases.

[K] We omit the rest of Nahmanides' examples of how Onkelos translates this word and most of his further discussion of verses elsewhere in the Bible.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **3 All the latter joined forces.** Rather, "all [nine of the kings] gathered "as allies" (OJPS) to make peace (Abarbanel). **Now the Dead Sea.** Dry land can be submerged and seas can turn dry for many reasons, as is explained in Aristotle's "Meteorology." But the text may be saying, as does OJPS, that the Valley of Siddim "is" the valley of the Dead Sea, the place where they would bring the water to manufacture salt (Gersonides).

4 In the thirteenth year. The Hebrew could mean "in the thirteenth year" or "for thirteen years"; we have no way of telling which is correct (Gersonides). **They rebelled.** By not sending the annual tribute due from vassal kings (Abarbanel).

6 Which is by the wilderness. This was "the wilderness of the peoples" (Ezek. 20:35) through which the Israelites would wander for 40 years (Hizkuni).

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NJPS [7]On their way back they came to En-mishpat, which is Kadesh, and subdued all the territory of the Amalekites, and also the Amorites who dwelt in Hazazon-tamar. [8]Then the king of Sodom, the king of Gomorrah, the king of Admah, the king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela, which is Zoar, went forth and engaged them in battle in the Valley of Siddim: [9]King Chedorlaomer of Elam, King Tidal of Goiim, King Amraphel of Shinar, and King Arioch of Ellasar—four kings against those five.

[10]Now the Valley of Siddim was dotted with bitumen pits; and the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah, in their flight, threw

[7] וַיָּשֻׁבוּ וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶל־עֵין מִשְׁפָּט הִוא קָדֵשׁ
וַיַּכּוּ אֶת־כָּל־שְׂדֵה הָעֲמָלֵקִי וְגַם אֶת־
הָאֱמֹרִי הַיּוֹשֵׁב בְּחַצְצֹן תָּמָר׃ [8] וַיֵּצֵא מֶלֶךְ־
סְדֹם וּמֶלֶךְ עֲמֹרָה וּמֶלֶךְ אַדְמָה וּמֶלֶךְ
צביים צְבוֹיִם וּמֶלֶךְ בֶּלַע הִוא־צֹעַר וַיַּעַרְכוּ
אִתָּם מִלְחָמָה בְּעֵמֶק הַשִּׂדִּים׃ [9] אֶת
כְּדָרְלָעֹמֶר מֶלֶךְ עֵילָם וְתִדְעָל מֶלֶךְ גּוֹיִם
וְאַמְרָפֶל מֶלֶךְ שִׁנְעָר וְאַרְיוֹךְ מֶלֶךְ אֶלָסָר
אַרְבָּעָה מְלָכִים אֶת־הַחֲמִשָּׁה׃
[10] וְעֵמֶק הַשִּׂדִּים בְּאֵרֹת חֵמָר
וַיָּנֻסוּ מֶלֶךְ־סְדֹם וַעֲמֹרָה וַיִּפְּלוּ־שָׁמָּה

OJPS [7]And they turned back, and came to En-mishpat—the same is Kadesh—and smote all the country of the Amalekites, and also the Amorites, that dwelt in Hazazon-tamar. [8]And there went out the king of Sodom, and the king of Gomorrah, and the king of Admah, and the king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela—the same is Zoar; and they set the battle in array against them in the vale of Siddim; [9]against Chedorlaomer king of Elam, and Tidal king of Goiim, and Amraphel king of Shinar, and Arioch king of Ellasar; four kings against the five.

[10]Now the vale of Siddim was full of slime pits; and the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, and they fell there, and

RASHI **7 En-mishpat, which is Kadesh.** This is the place where Moses and Aaron would face judgment (*mishpat*) about that *en,* that "spring"—the Waters of Meribah, as they are called in Numbers 20. But Onkelos translates the name: "the spring of judgment," the place where the people of that region would gather for judgment. **The territory of the Amalekites.** Amalek had not yet been born; **[H]** this too is given a name it would bear only in the future. **Hazazon-tamar.** This is En-gedi, as we know from the story of Jehoshaphat in Chronicles: "'A great multitude is coming against you from beyond the sea, from Aram, and is now in Hazazon-tamar'—that is, En-gedi" (2 Chron. 20:2).

9 Four kings against those five. Yet the smaller group was victorious. This teaches you how mighty they were—yet Abraham pursued them nonetheless.

10 Dotted with bitumen pits. There were many pits there from which they extracted bitumen for use as mortar in building. **The kings of Sodom and Gomorrah, in their**

[H] See 36:12.

RASHBAM **14:10 Now the Valley of Siddim was dotted with bitumen pits; and the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah, in their flight, threw themselves into them.** Rather, "pits of clay"—not that they

IBN EZRA **9 King Chedorlaomer of Elam.** NJPS ignores the first Hebrew word of the verse, taking it to mark these as direct objects, but in fact our verse is saying that the kings of v. 8 fought "with" (that is, "against," OJPS) King Chedorlaomer and the others.

10 Pits. The Hebrew word does not mean a hole in the ground; it is used elsewhere for "well," and in Biblical Hebrew

KIMHI **7 En-mishpat.** In those days everyone knew why the place was called this, just as all the other places had names whose meaning was understood in their own time. **The territory of the Amalekites.** Literally, the "field" of the Amalekites; a large plain in which cities are built can have this name in the Bible (see 32:4 and 36:5 for other examples). Amalek himself had not yet been born, of course, but he had been by the time Moses wrote the Torah. (So it is not really being given a "future" name.) By then, Amalek was notorious for his enmity toward Israel.

8 Engaged them in battle. The four kings engaged "them," the five kings, hoping to overcome them before they could add yet another force to their side. That is why they had rebelled against them now, despite the fact that they themselves were only four kingdoms.

9 King Chedorlaomer of Elam. Rather, "against" Chedorlaomer (see OJPS). Since the previous verse already says "against" them, we understand that the five kings did indeed add another allied force. Yet the four kings nonetheless overcame them. It was so decreed by the Lord, in order to fulfill His promise to Abraham, "I will make your name great" (12:2), and to show the world Abraham's righteousness and his complete reliance on God, for he pursued the four kings with a much smaller force. Of him and everyone like him we read, "he who trusts in the LORD shall be safeguarded" (Prov. 29:25). **Four kings against those five.** This emphasizes the situation still further.

10 The kings of Sodom and Gomorrah, in their flight, threw themselves into them. That is, they fell in accidentally, not being careful enough to avoid them. They did not die but sank in the bitumen and were pulled out of it later. Perhaps they did not die so that

NAHMANIDES **7 En-mishpat.** Rashi's comment is aggadic. I cannot really understand it, since v. 6 shows that this Kadesh is Kadesh-barnea: "at Kadesh in the wilderness of Paran" (Num. 13:26). Deut. 1:19 proves that this was Kadesh-barnea. The Kadesh where those righteous men faced judgment was in the wilderness of Zin, which they reached only in the 40th year of the wandering, when "the Israelites arrived in a body at the wilderness of Zin" (Num. 20:1). Perhaps the midrash is simply about the allusion found in the name. **The territory of the Amalekites.** I do not know what Rashi means. If Moses gave it the name it was called in his own time, there is no allusion to the future here. But how could the gentiles of Abram's day call it by this name prophetically? The midrash Rashi quotes is announcing, as the Sages often do in such cases, that the Holy One "foretells the end from the beginning" (Isa. 46:10). For example, they understand 2:14 as saying that the Tigris "flows east of [what will eventually belong to] Asshur." From my perspective, there was most likely in ancient times some highly respected man among the Horites named Amalek, who ruled the place. Eliphaz, Esau's first-born, named one of his sons after the man. **[L]** Perhaps Eliphaz' wife Timnah was descended from that family.

10 Bitumen pits. These were undoubtedly pits with bitumen and clay still in them, like the muddy pits of Jer. 38:6 and Ps. 40:3. **The kings of Sodom and Gomorrah, in their flight, threw themselves into them.** Presumably they would have been able to climb out with no need of a miracle. As for the midrash, am I really supposed to believe that people who did not believe in the miracle done for

[L] See 36:12.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **8 Then the king of Sodom , the king of Gomorrah, the king of Admah, the king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela, which is Zoar, went forth and engaged them in battle.** Seeing that the four kings were exhausted by the fighting they had been doing (Abarbanel). **In the Valley of Siddim.** In exactly the same place they had previously made peace (Abarbanel).

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NJPS themselves into them, while the rest escaped to the hill country. 11[The invaders] seized all the wealth of Sodom and Gomorrah and all their provisions, and went their way. 12They also took Lot, the son of Abram's brother, and his possessions, and departed; for he had settled in Sodom.

13A fugitive brought the news to Abram the Hebrew, who was dwelling at the terebinths of Mamre the Amorite, kinsman of Eshkol and Aner, these being Abram's

וְהַנִּשְׁאָרִים הֵרָה נָסוּ׃ 11 וַיִּקְחוּ אֶת־כָּל־
רְכֻשׁ סְדֹם וַעֲמֹרָה וְאֶת־כָּל־אָכְלָם וַיֵּלֵכוּ׃
12 וַיִּקְחוּ אֶת־לוֹט וְאֶת־רְכֻשׁוֹ בֶּן־אֲחִי
אַבְרָם וַיֵּלֵכוּ וְהוּא יֹשֵׁב בִּסְדֹם׃
13 וַיָּבֹא הַפָּלִיט וַיַּגֶּד לְאַבְרָם הָעִבְרִי וְהוּא
שֹׁכֵן בְּאֵלֹנֵי מַמְרֵא הָאֱמֹרִי אֲחִי אֶשְׁכֹּל
וַאֲחִי עָנֵר וְהֵם בַּעֲלֵי בְרִית־אַבְרָם׃

OJPS they that remained fled to the mountain. 11And they took all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah, and all their victuals, and went their way. 12And they took Lot, Abram's brother's son, who dwelt in Sodom, and his goods, and departed.

13And there came one that had escaped, and told Abram the Hebrew—now he dwelt by the terebinths of Mamre the Amorite, brother of Eshcol, and brother of Aner; and these were confederate with

RASHI **flight, threw themselves into them.** There is a midrash that the clay was worked right in these pits, and that the King of Sodom got stuck in one of them and got out of it only by means of a miracle. For some of the people did not believe that Abraham had been rescued from the fiery furnace in Ur of the Chaldeans. When a similar miracle saved the king of Sodom, they believed in the Abraham miracle too, retrospectively. **To the hill country.** "To" can be represented by ל attached to the beginning of the word or ה attached to the end of the word. But our verse does not say "to the mountain" (OJPS); it says "to *a* mountain." Each of them fled to whatever mountain he found first. It could only be "to *the* mountain" if there was also a ה attached to the beginning of the word to indicate the definite article.

12 He had settled in Sodom. What caused him to be captured? His settling in Sodom.

13 A fugitive. Literally, "the" fugitive. In a straightforward reading of the text, this must be Og, for only he "was left of the remaining Rephaim" (Deut. 3:11). He was the only one not killed by Amraphel and his allies when they "defeated the Rephaim at Ashteroth-karnaim" (v. 5; see the Tanhuma). Genesis Rabbah says that what Og escaped was the Flood; he was the only one left from the days when "the Nephilim appeared on earth" (6:4). **[I] Brought the news to Abram.** What Og intended was for Abraham to be killed so he could marry Sarah. **The Hebrew.** So called because he came from *eber ha-nahar*, the "other side" of the Euphrates. **Abram's allies.** Literally, these were people who had "made a covenant" with him.

[I] Both the Rephaim and the Nephilim are identified as Anakites, that is, Titans.

RASHBAM were full of clay; they had been dug to provide the earth to make clay. The kings were hiding in these pits.

IBN EZRA always refers to a pit flowing with a liquid. (The construct form used in our verse is somewhat strange.) **Threw themselves into them.** The Hebrew merely says that they "fell" into them (see OJPS), but NJPS understands correctly that this was deliberate, as when one "falls" on one's face. They were trying to escape the pursuers. **To the hill country.** Another strange Hebrew form.

12 For he had settled in Sodom. Rather, "for he was staying in Sodom" on that particular day.

13 A fugitive. Someone from Sodom who had fled the battle and escaped, as in "a fugitive came to me from Jerusalem" (Ezek. 33:21). There is a midrashic interpretation of this expression as well.

KIMHI they could witness the miracle that God did for Abraham. **While the rest escaped to the hill country.** Evidently they ran faster and were stronger.

11 [The invaders] seized all the wealth of Sodom and Gomorrah. "Wealth" includes both movable goods and livestock. The valley where the battle occurred was in their territory; Admah, Zeboiim, and Bela were not on that side. **All their provisions.** That they had in their houses. They took the people captive as well.

12 For he had settled in Sodom. When he "pitched his tents near Sodom" (13:12). But our verse literally says, "he was [still] living" there at the time of this battle.

13 A fugitive. Someone who had escaped capture. **Brought the news.** That his nephew had been captured. **Abram the Hebrew.** That is, one of the descendants of Eber. Many people had descended from Eber, but Abraham and his offspring were especially conscious of it, since they continued to speak the Hebrew language, while the others—like Laban "the Aramean" (25:20)—spoke Aramaic. **Who was dwelling at the terebinths of Mamre the Amorite, kinsman of Eshkol and Aner, these being Abram's allies.** All three brothers were Abram's allies; he was "settled in" with them (as the verb here really means) but was dwelling in the country of one of the brothers, Mamre.

NAHMANIDES Abraham would be convinced to believe in the Holy One by a miracle done for the king of Sodom, who was an idolater? Such a "miracle" could do nothing but strengthen the belief in idolatry, or convince them that all such things were either magic or ordinary, if improbable, occurrences. It would have simply increased the doubt in the minds of those who did not already believe in the miracle done for Abraham. Perhaps the midrash was reading "the king of Sodom came out" (v. 17) to mean that he came "out" of the pit, when Abraham passed by, and that the miracle was done for him in Abraham's honor. Perhaps the "miracle" was performed by Abraham himself, who wanted to return these kings' property to them, found them in the pits, and pulled them out. According to this reading, the miracle was done only for the king of Sodom; the king of Gomorrah must have died before Abraham showed up or fallen into a pit somewhere else. If the miracle involved Abraham, this would indeed be a reason it should convince people that a miracle had been done for Abraham himself. "Into them" does not mean the two kings were in the same location; the Hebrew says merely "there" (OJPS), referring to the valley.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **12 They also took Lot.** For Amraphel, the king of Shinar, was of course really Nimrod, who hated Abraham (Abarbanel). They knew Abram was rich and would ransom him (Sforno). **For he had settled in Sodom.** Temporarily, out of fear (Hizkuni).

13 A fugitive brought the news to Abram the Hebrew. The fugitive did not know they were related, but he knew that Lot was also a Hebrew and shared the same religious beliefs as Abram (Sforno).

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NJPS allies. 14When Abram heard that his kinsman had been taken captive, he mustered his retainers, born into his household, numbering three hundred and eighteen, and went in pursuit as far as Dan. 15At night, he and his servants deployed against them and defeated them; and he pursued them as far as Hobah, which is north of

14 וַיִּשְׁמַע אַבְרָם כִּי נִשְׁבָּה אָחִיו וַיָּרֶק
אֶת־חֲנִיכָיו יְלִידֵי בֵיתוֹ שְׁמֹנָה עָשָׂר
וּשְׁלֹשׁ מֵאוֹת וַיִּרְדֹּף עַד־דָּן׃ 15 וַיֵּחָלֵק
עֲלֵיהֶם ׀ לַיְלָה הוּא וַעֲבָדָיו וַיַּכֵּם וַיִּרְדְּפֵם
עַד־חוֹבָה אֲשֶׁר מִשְּׂמֹאל לְדַמָּשֶׂק׃

OJPS Abram. 14And when Abram heard that his brother was taken captive, he led forth his trained men, born in his house, three hundred and eighteen, and pursued as far as Dan. 15And he divided himself against them by night, he and his servants, and smote them, and pursued them unto Hobah, which is on the left hand of

RASHI **14 He mustered his retainers.** Rather, as Onkelos translates it, he "activated" or "armed" them: "I will *unsheathe* the sword against you" (Lev. 26:33); "*ready* the spear and javelin against my pursuers" (Ps. 35:3). Note that his "retainers" are really the men he had "trained" (OJPS). This root refers to a process of initiation, whether for a person or a thing: "the *dedication* offering" (Num. 7:10); "*train* a lad in the way he ought to go" (Prov. 22:6). But the word is spelled without the second י that turns it into a plural, **[J]** so our Sages understand Abraham's "retainer" to be Eliezer, whom he initiated into the observance of the commandments. **Three hundred and eighteen.** Our Sages say that Eliezer was alone; 318 is the numerical value of his name. **As far as Dan.** His strength failed him when he foresaw that his descendants would set up a golden calf there. **[K]**

15 At night. They continued to pursue them after dark. **He and his servants deployed against them.** NJPS understands the convoluted syntax of the verse (see OJPS) correctly. But "divided" of OJPS gives a better sense of what is happening. The pursuers split up into different groups because the people they were chasing were fleeing every which way. A midrash reads the unusual Hebrew here as follows: "The night was divided for them." During the first half of the night, until midnight, a miracle was performed for Abram; **[L]** the second half of that miraculous night was kept in reserve until the "midnight" of Exod. 11:4, in Egypt. **As far as Hobah.** That is, as far as Dan, here called *ḥobah* ("guilt") on account of the idolatry that would one day go on there.

RASHBAM **15 He pursued them as far as Hobah.** "Hobah" is not a proper noun here but a word for a hiding place, derived from חבא.

IBN EZRA **14 He mustered his retainers.** More precisely, he "equipped" them—as in "*ready* the spear and javelin" (Ps. 35:3)—by arming them. But some understand this verb to mean "unsheathe," as in "*emptying* their sacks" (42:35). (Spears can be sheathed, too.) As for "retainers," these are really men whom he had "trained" (OJPS) over and over again, though the text has not mentioned this. **Three hundred and eighteen.** It is midrash to say that this is the numerical value of Eliezer's name. The text does not deal in *gematria*. Anyone could turn any name into something positive or something negative. But it is just a name.

[J] In our texts it is not spelled this way, and this comment is not in the first printed edition of Rashi's commentary. But see his next comment. **[K]** See 2 Kings 10:29. **[L]** That with so few men he defeated the armies of the four kings.

KIMHI **14 His kinsman.** Literally "his brother" (OJPS), but one's brothers' children are like one's brothers. Indeed, Abram had already told Lot, "we are brothers" (13:8). **He mustered his retainers.** He armed them. Notice that in such verses as "they shall *unsheathe* their swords" (Ezek. 28:7) and "*ready* the spear and javelin" (Ps. 35:3), the object of our same verb is the weapons themselves, while here the weapons are understood and the object of the verb is those who are armed with them. As for "his retainers," the word really means "those he had trained" in the true path, to serve the Lord. **Born into his household.** Born of "the persons that they had acquired in Haran" (12:5) as well as in Canaan. **Three hundred and eighteen.** The midrash says Eliezer alone went with him, basing itself on the *gematria* of the name Eliezer. But why would the text also refer to those "born into his household" if it did not mean to say that they also went along? **And went in pursuit as far as Dan.** As it would be called only long after the time of Moses, when "the Danites . . . captured it and . . . changed the name of Leshem to Dan, after their ancestor Dan" (Josh. 19:47). But possibly there was some location that was already called "Dan" even at the time of this story.

15 At night, he and his servants deployed against them and defeated them. Rather, "when the night divided on them" (that is, at midnight) "he and his servants" (his retainers) came up suddenly "and defeated them." The unusual terminology reflects the fact that until midnight the four kings were proceeding confidently, while from midnight on, when Abraham caught up with them, they were fleeing for their lives. Obviously Abraham defeated only those whom he caught. The others abandoned the property and the captives and fled for their lives. **He pursued them as far as Hobah.** At which point he stopped pursuing them and turned back to retrieve the property.

NAHMANIDES **15 At night, he and his servants deployed against them.** Despite what Rashi says, by nightfall they had only gotten as far as Dan, at which point it got dark and they could not see where those they were pursuing had fled. Abraham split his people up into two or three groups, himself taking charge of one of them, and they followed all the possible paths the others could have taken. That is, he did not "deploy" the entire group, but "divided himself against them" (OJPS) when night came. **He pursued them as far as Hobah, which is north of Damascus.** From the terebinths of Mamre, near Hebron in the land of Judah, it is a long way to Damascus, which is outside the land of Israel. So he must have spent many days in this pursuit before catching up with them. (They were on their way back home to Babylonia.) Alternatively, this was a major miracle; see how the Sages interpret Isa. 41:3 in Genesis Rabbah. **[M]**

[M] They argue about whether each of Abraham's steps covered one mile or three.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **14 He mustered his retainers.** Rather, his recent "trainees" (Hizkuni). The people who had grown up in his household and been trained in his own praiseworthy ways. But some of them may certainly have been trained fighters as would befit a great house like Abram's, especially since he was so far away from his family (Gersonides).

15 At night, he and his servants deployed against them and defeated them. Rather, he "split up" against them, taking advantage of the darkness to surround them on every side so that no one could escape (Gersonides). Attacking from different sides would fool them into thinking the attacking forces were larger than they really were (Abarbanel). Ahithophel proposed the same clever plan when he said to Absalom in 2 Sam. 17:1, "Let me pick twelve thousand men and set out tonight in pursuit of David" (Sforno). **And he pursued them.** Literally, he "smote them" (that is, killed them) "and pursued them" (OJPS)—an impossibility. But Abraham killed the ones whom the Holy One "pursued" (Hizkuni). **North of Damascus.** Where Eliezer's family lived. They helped Abraham on Eliezer's account (Hizkuni).

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NJPS Damascus. 16He brought back all the possessions; he also brought back his kinsman Lot and his possessions, and the women and the rest of the people.

17When he returned from defeating Chedorlaomer and the kings with him, the king of Sodom came out to meet him in the Valley of Shaveh, which is the Valley of the King. 18And King Melchizedek of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was

16 וַיָּשֶׁב אֶת כָּל־הָרְכ�ush וְגַם אֶת־לוֹט אָחִיו
וּרְכֻשׁוֹ הֵשִׁיב וְגַם אֶת־הַנָּשִׁים וְאֶת־
הָעָם׃
17 וַיֵּצֵא מֶלֶךְ־סְדֹם לִקְרָאתוֹ אַחֲרֵי שׁוּבוֹ
מֵהַכּוֹת אֶת־כְּדָרְלָעֹמֶר וְאֶת־הַמְּלָכִים
אֲשֶׁר אִתּוֹ אֶל־עֵמֶק שָׁוֵה הִוא עֵמֶק
הַמֶּלֶךְ׃ 18 וּמַלְכִּי־צֶדֶק מֶלֶךְ שָׁלֵם הוֹצִיא
לֶחֶם וְיַיִן וְהוּא כֹהֵן לְאֵל עֶלְיוֹן׃

OJPS Damascus. 16And he brought back all the goods, and also brought back his brother Lot, and his goods, and the women also, and the people.

17And the king of Sodom went out to meet him, after his return from the slaughter of Chedorlaomer and the kings that were with him, at the vale of Shaveh—the same is the King's Vale. 18And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine; and he was priest of God the

RASHI **17 The Valley of Shaveh.** Or, as Onkelos has it, "the flat plain." It was clear of trees and of any other possible obstacle. **The Valley of the King.** According to Onkelos, this was a piece of ground one furlong in length (30 rods) that the king could use for play. But the midrash takes the combination of names to indicate that this was a valley where all the nations came together as equals (*shaveh*) and crowned Abram as their leader, "the elect of God" (23:6) over them.

18 Melchizedek. According to the midrash, this was Shem. **Brought out bread and wine.** As is commonly done for those who are returning fatigued from battle. Shem was showing Abram that he had no enmity toward him for killing his descendants. **[M]** The midrash takes "bread and wine" here as an allusion to the offerings that Abraham's own descendants would one day make here.

[M] Chedorlaomer was king of Elam; according to 10:22, Elam was a descendant of Shem.

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Once "the king of Sodom" (v. 17) comes out to meet Abraham, why does the story about "King Melchizedek of Salem" (v. 18) interrupt it?

RASHBAM **17 The king of Sodom came out to meet him.** Having emerged from the cave where he and the king of Gomorrah had been hiding.

18 King Melchizedek of Salem. This story interrupts the story of the king of Sodom in vv. 17 and 21–24 to teach us that Abraham was speaking the strict truth when he told the king of Sodom, "only that which the young men have eaten" (v. 24; see OJPS). Abraham himself ate from what King Melchizedek gave him.

KIMHI **16 The women and the rest of the people.** Who had been taken captive. The point is to let us know that they had not killed any of the captives.

17 In the Valley of Shaveh. The "level" valley, meaning that it had no rises or hollows; it was used for racing horses. **The Valley of the King.** It was the king and his nobles, of course, who raced their horses there. The 30 rods mentioned by Onkelos are precisely the distance over which horses are raced.

18 King Melchizedek of Salem. All the kings of Jerusalem took a *-zedek* suffix to their names, meaning "righteousness"; see "King Adoni-zedek of Jerusalem" (Josh. 10:1). For Jerusalem is a place of righteousness and peace and cannot bear iniquity, violence, or abomination for very long. If sinners do live there, it spews them out: "let not the land spew you out for defiling it, as it spewed out the nation that came before you" (Lev. 18:28). Other gods are "alien" (Deut. 31:16) to it, for it lies along the equator and has a temperate climate. Hence the psalmist calls Mount Zion "fair in situation, the joy of all the earth" (Ps. 48:3).

IBN EZRA **18 Melchizedek.** So named because he was king (*melech*) over a place of righteousness (*zedek*). But some say it is just a name. **Salem.** Jerusalem. The proof is in Ps. 76:3, "Salem became His abode; Zion, His den." **He was a priest of God Most High.** That is, as the Aramaic translation puts it, he "served before" God Most High (which is what priests do). That is what the verb from this root means: "that they may *serve* Me *as priests*" (Exod. 40:15). As we see from the pun on Melchizedek in Ps. 110:4, "You are a priest forever, *a rightful king* by My decree," he acted properly by first offering blessing to Abram, who had voluntarily rescued the captives, and only then blessing God.

NAHMANIDES **18 King Melchizedek of Salem.** Salem is Jerusalem, as is clear from "Salem became His abode; Zion, His den" (Ps. 76:3). In the time of Joshua, there was still a "King Adoni-zedek of Jerusalem" (Josh. 10:1). All the nations had long known that this spot was a special place, in the center of the inhabited world, or they knew by tradition that it was in the spot corresponding to the Sanctuary on high, where the Shekhinah of the Holy One—which is named Zedek, "righteousness"—dwells. As Genesis Rabbah says, the place makes its inhabitants righteous. So Melchizedek and Adoni-zedek simply mean "king/lord of Zedek," that is, of Jerusalem, the city that is "called City of Righteousness [Zedek]" (Isa. 1:26). **[N] He was a priest of God Most High.** This lets us know that Abraham would not give a tithe to a priest of other gods. But knowing that he was a priest of God Most High, he gave him a tenth of everything in honor of the Holy One. This also provided Abraham with a hint that the future House of God would be there, where his descendants would bring their tithes and offerings and bless the Lord. The midrash that says Melchizedek was Shem implies both that he came to Jerusalem in order to serve God and that they readily accepted him as the honored brother of their own ancestor, Ham. (Rashi's comment to "the Canaanites were then in the land" of 12:6 is wrong; Jerusalem had always been part of Canaanite territory, which reached north as far as Sidon. The territory of Shem was in the east, far from Israel. Even if Noah expressed his intention to give that land to Shem, the Canaanites were legitimately settled there until the Holy One transferred it to Abraham.) See once again my comments to 12:6.

[N] In our texts, Nahmanides cites Isa. 1:21; but Isa. 1:26 makes the same point more clearly.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **16 And the women.** Lot's wives (Sforno).

17 The king of Sodom came out to meet him in the Valley of Shaveh. But he said nothing to him until Abram and his troops had had a chance to eat and drink (Gersonides).

18 King Melchizedek of Salem brought out bread and wine. To feed his battle-weary troops, as Shobi son of Nahash, Machir son of Ammiel, and Barzillai the Gileadite did for David (see 2 Samuel 17) when he was fleeing from Absalom (Bekhor Shor). Melchizedek brought out bread and wine that was untithed so that he could give a tenth of it to Abraham, who was a priest, as v. 20 makes plain (Hizkuni). All the kings of Jerusalem bore the title Zedek, just as the kings of Egypt were called Pharaoh (Gersonides).

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NJPS a priest of God Most High. 19He blessed him, saying,
"Blessed be Abram of God Most High,
Creator of heaven and earth.
20And blessed be God Most High,
Who has delivered your foes into your hand."
And [Abram] gave him a tenth of everything.
21Then the king of Sodom said to Abram, "Give me the persons, and take the

OJPS Most High. 19And he blessed him, and said:
"Blessed be Abram of God Most High,
Maker of heaven and earth;
20and blessed be God the Most High,
who hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand."
And he gave him a tenth of all.
21And the king of Sodom said unto Abram: "Give me the persons, and take the

19 וַיְבָרְכֵהוּ וַיֹּאמַר
בָּרוּךְ אַבְרָם לְאֵל עֶלְיוֹן
קֹנֵה שָׁמַיִם וָאָרֶץ׃
20 וּבָרוּךְ אֵל עֶלְיוֹן
אֲשֶׁר־מִגֵּן צָרֶיךָ בְּיָדֶךָ
וַיִּתֶּן־לוֹ מַעֲשֵׂר מִכֹּל׃ חמישי
21 וַיֹּאמֶר מֶלֶךְ־סְדֹם אֶל־אַבְרָם תֶּן־לִי

RASHI **19 Creator of heaven and earth.** Though the Hebrew root more often refers to buying than creating, this phrase means the same thing as "maker of heaven and earth" (Ps. 121:2 and four other times in Psalms). By making them, He acquired them as His own.

20 And Abram gave him a tenth of everything. Abraham tithed everything he had to Melchizedek, because he was "a priest" (v. 18).

RASHBAM **21 Then the king of Sodom said to Abram.** As we see from v. 2, where he is listed first, he was the leader of the five kings and spoke here on behalf of all five.

IBN EZRA **20 Abram gave him a tenth of everything.** In God's honor. He found no one more worthy of receiving this tithe than Melchizedek.

21 Give me the persons. My people who were captured, whom you rescued. Just give me back those persons.

KIMHI **19 Creator.** Not "buyer," as this word would ordinarily be translated, but "maker" or "inventor"; see my comment to "I have gained a male child" of 4:1.

20 God Most High. He repeated the name he used in v. 19, and Abram too would swear by this name in v. 22, to remove from the minds of anyone hearing them who worshiped other gods the idea that it is possible to worship anyone but the Lord alone. He is the Most High, lord over all the creatures both in the upper and the lower worlds. **Your foes.** They had not originally been Abram's foes—he had had no quarrel with them. But once they captured his kinsman and his property, they became his foes. Abram was famous, and everyone knew Lot was his kinsman, and yet they did not leave him alone for Abram's sake. **And Abram gave him a tenth of everything.** The text merely says "he" (OJPS) gave him a tenth. The commentators do indeed assume that Abram gave this to Melchizedek. But my father (of blessed memory) said that it was Melchizedek who gave a tenth to Abraham as his just reward. Notice that the king of Sodom told Abram, "take the possessions for yourself" (v. 21), though Abraham refused. Melchizedek told Abraham, "You are perfectly entitled to a tenth of everything, and you will not be taking anything from the king of Sodom; it is justly yours." Indeed, anyone who saves another's property is entitled to a tenth of it as the reward for his trouble. This explanation is certainly correct. One must ask the commentators by what right Abram could give the king of Sodom's property to Melchizedek? Could he himself refuse it and yet give it to someone else? That makes no sense.

21 The king of Sodom said to Abram, "Give me the persons, and take the possessions for yourself." According to my father's explanation, he must already have said this before Melchizedek told Abram that the tenth belonged to him.

NAHMANIDES **19 God Most High.** Since there are priests in every nation serving the angels who are called "gods" with a small *g* (see, e.g., Exod. 15:11), the Holy One is called God Most High, implying also the most powerful. Remember that the basic meaning of *el* is "power," as in "I have it in my power" (31:29). Melchizedek does not connect the Tetragrammaton with that name, but Abraham does, in v. 22. **Creator of heaven and earth.** Note that Rashi is giving two separate explanations: that He "made" them and the He "acquired" them. This root may well refer to making: in Ps. 139:13, "it was You who *created* my conscience," our root is parallel to "You fashioned me in my mother's womb." The same happens in Deut. 32:6, where "*created* you" is parallel to "fashioned you." The opposite semantic change is found in "the persons that they had *acquired* in Haran" (12:5), where the verb is literally "made," and in 31:1, which refers to "making" money. But what is correct is Rashi's comment that "He *acquired* them as His own." Note that the same root gives us the word *mikneh* ("livestock"), which is the most important form of one's pecuniary wealth. Rabbinic sources use the root this way as well. Note that Onkelos translates not "creator of heaven and earth" but "whose *possessions* are heaven and earth."

20 And Abram gave him a tenth of everything. Abraham did not want to take so much as a sandal strap for himself. But he did separate the portion belonging to the One on high, to give it to a priest. The king of Sodom had come out to meet him in the Valley of Shaveh, out of respect for him, and came with him to Salem, where King Melchizedek brought out bread and wine for his followers. The king of Sodom asked him for nothing at first, but when he saw how generous Abraham had been in tithing, he asked him to be charitable and give him "the persons" (v. 21). Abraham, being confident that God would give him wealth and honor, gave him back all the property of Sodom, which was his own, as well as the property of Gomorrah, for him to return to its owners. For the king of Sodom asked for *all* "the persons" (v. 21), and Abram was insistent that *none* of them should claim to have "made Abram rich" (v. 23). As for Admah, Zeboiim, and Zoar, they were attacked, but nothing was taken from them; only the property of the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah was taken, since those kings had gone off and their cities were abandoned. But see my comment to v. 23.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **19 God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth.** Despite what some scientists think, there is no natural explanation for the existence of heaven and earth (Sforno).

20 And Abram gave him a tenth of everything. Rather, as OJPS correctly translates, "he [Melchizedek] gave him [Abraham] a tenth" (Hizkuni). Melchizedek was removed from the priesthood for blessing Abraham first (in v. 19) and the Holy One only afterward. This is what Ps. 110:4 tells us: "You are a priest forever, after what Melchizedek said." The NJPS translation has Abraham contradicting what he says in v. 23 about not taking any of the spoils (Hizkuni).

21 Give me the persons. Seeing that Abram had tithed to Melchizedek, he assumed that he intended to keep the other nine-tenths for himself (Bekhor Shor).

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NJPS possessions for yourself." 22But Abram said to the king of Sodom, "I swear to the LORD, God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth: 23I will not take so much as a thread or a sandal strap of what is yours; you shall not say, 'It is I who made Abram rich.' 24For me, nothing but what my servants have used up; as for the share of the men who went with me—Aner, Eshkol, and Mamre—let them take their share."

הַנֶּפֶשׁ וְהָרְכֻשׁ קַח־לָךְ׃ 22 וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָם
אֶל־מֶלֶךְ סְדֹם הֲרִימֹתִי יָדִי אֶל־יְהוָה אֵל
עֶלְיוֹן קֹנֵה שָׁמַיִם וָאָרֶץ׃ 23 אִם־מִחוּט
וְעַד שְׂרוֹךְ־נַעַל וְאִם־אֶקַּח מִכָּל־אֲשֶׁר־לָךְ
וְלֹא תֹאמַר אֲנִי הֶעֱשַׁרְתִּי אֶת־אַבְרָם׃
24 בִּלְעָדַי רַק אֲשֶׁר אָכְלוּ הַנְּעָרִים וְחֵלֶק
הָאֲנָשִׁים אֲשֶׁר הָלְכוּ אִתִּי עָנֵר אֶשְׁכֹּל
וּמַמְרֵא הֵם יִקְחוּ חֶלְקָם׃ ס

OJPS goods to thyself." 22And Abram said to the king of Sodom: "I have lifted up my hand unto the LORD, God Most High, Maker of heaven and earth, 23that I will not take a thread nor a shoe-latchet nor aught that is thine, lest thou shouldest say: I have made Abram rich; 24save only that which the young men have eaten, and the portion of the men which went with me, Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre, let them take their portion."

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Since it was Abraham who took the spoils, what possible right could the king of Sodom have to say, "It is I who made Abram rich" (v. 23), as Abraham feared?

RASHI **22 I swear**. The Hebrew verb is a past tense (see OJPS, which translates the idiom literally), but in this kind of context a past tense implies that a present action is as good as done. For a similar past tense, see the Hebrew of "Let me pay the price of the land" (23:13).

23 I will not take so much as a thread or a sandal strap. I am refraining from taking any of what was captured. **Of what is yours**. Even if you offer me payment from your treasury, I will not take it. **You shall not say, "It is I who made Abram rich."** It was the Holy One who promised me wealth: "I will bless you" (12:2).

24 My servants. Again, NJPS translates idiomatically, OJPS literally. **The men who went with me** and also **Aner, Eshkol, and Mamre—let them take their share**. Even though I and my servants were in combat (see v. 15) and they merely guarded the baggage. Let them take their share nonetheless. — David learned this from him: "The share of those who remain with the baggage shall be the same as the share of those who go down to battle; they shall share alike" (1 Sam. 30:24). And indeed, "from that day on it was made a fixed rule for Israel, continuing to the present day" (1 Sam. 30:25). But in fact that latter verse does not say "from that day on" but "on up through that day." For that rule had already been established in Abram's day.

RASHBAM **23 A thread or a sandal strap**. The "thread" (as B. Shab. 57a tells us) is a woman's decorative silk headband. So this is the equivalent of "from head to toe."

24 For me, nothing but what my servants have used up. I myself have used nothing.

IBN EZRA **22 I swear**. Literally, "I have lifted up my hand" (OJPS) to take an oath: "I raise My hand to heaven and say: As I live forever" (Deut. 32:40). **God Most High**. I swear in the name of the God by which that priest blessed me.

23 A thread. Of the kind used for sewing. **A sandal strap**. The leather piece that holds the sandal on.

24 For me. Just what he himself had already used up. **[J] My servants**. OJPS translates literally, but NJPS has the sense.

[J] This interpretation, from the long commentary, seems to be the comment Kimhi refers to.

KIMHI **22 I swear to the LORD**. This is the correct interpretation of the literal Hebrew "I have lifted up my hand" (OJPS), as is made clear when Daniel says, "I heard the man dressed in linen . . . swear by the Ever-living One as he lifted his right hand and his left hand to heaven" (Dan. 12:7). Sometimes, as here, only lifting the hand is mentioned; see (e.g.) Exod. 6:8.

23 I will not take. Both translations ignore the ו that introduces this verb: "I have not taken, and I will not take."

24 For me. Rather, "except for" (compare OJPS); the ending of this word is plural (the final ם is sometimes omitted) and does not mean "me." Ibn Ezra thinks it does, however; see his comment. **My servants**. The "retainers, born into his household" of v. 14. **Let them take their share**. I have no authority to give up their share of the reward, to which they are entitled by law and custom.

NAHMANIDES **22 I swear to the LORD**. Rashi's explanation matches what I found in the Sifrei. Onkelos understands Abraham to be "lifting up his hand" (see OJPS) in a gesture of prayer, as if to say, "thus and more may God do to me if I have taken anything that is yours." My own view is that Abraham was symbolically offering it to heaven, thus proscribing it from himself; remember that "lifting the hand" is the biblical idiom for a contribution, especially one that is sanctified. So Abraham was telling him that nothing he took would be his own; it would all be an offering to the Lord. Genesis Rabbah says exactly this.

23 I will not take so much as a thread or a sandal strap of what is yours. See the more literal translation of OJPS. He may be saying, "I will not keep so much as a sandal strap belonging to any of you kings, *nor* will I accept anything of what you personally have given me."

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **22 I swear to the LORD**. That is not what "I have lifted up my hand" (OJPS) means. He is saying, "I have lifted up my hand to the Lord to accept whatever He chooses to give me. But I will accept nothing from you" (Abarbanel).

23 A thread or a sandal strap. I have heard that this "thread" really refers to one's sword belt, found in combination with "sandal strap" in Isa. 5:27 (Bekhor Shor). **You shall not say, "It is I who made Abram rich."** Rather, "If I took so much as a sandal strap from you, would you not say, 'It is I who made Abram rich'?" (Abarbanel).

24 The men who went with me . . . let them take their share. I cannot accept the explanation that what David does in 1 Sam. 30:24 is derived from this. Abraham gave a share only to "his servants" (v. 15), who went with him to fight; Aner, Eshkol, and Mamre were not his servants but his allies. They stayed behind to protect his home and his livestock. Rashi did not quite understand this (Abarbanel). I will not give them anything, they must take it on their own (Sforno).

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NJPS 15 Some time later, the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision. He said,

"Fear not, Abram,
I am a shield to you;
Your reward shall be very great."

2But Abram said, "O Lord GOD, what can You give me, seeing that I shall die childless, and the one in charge of my

OJPS 15 After these things the word of the LORD came unto Abram in a vision, saying:

"Fear not, Abram,
I am thy shield,
thy reward shall be exceeding great."

2And Abram said: "O Lord GOD, what wilt Thou give me, seeing I go hence childless, and he that shall be possessor of

טו

אַחַר ׀ הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה הָיָה
דְּבַר־יְהוָה אֶל־אַבְרָם בַּמַּחֲזֶה לֵאמֹר
אַל־תִּירָא אַבְרָם
אָנֹכִי מָגֵן לָךְ
שְׂכָרְךָ הַרְבֵּה מְאֹד׃
2 וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָם אֲדֹנָי יֱהוִה מַה־תִּתֶּן־לִי
וְאָנֹכִי הוֹלֵךְ עֲרִירִי וּבֶן־מֶשֶׁק בֵּיתִי הוּא

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why is it that "the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision" (v. 1), after the many previous times when Abraham has received prophecy? ✦ We are not told how Abraham received the previous prophecies; why does it matter how he received this one? ✦ Why does the Holy One say, "Fear not"? What did Abraham have to be afraid of? ✦ How could Abraham possibly say, "O Lord GOD, what can You give me, seeing that I shall die childless" (v. 2)? Is there really nothing the Holy One could give him but children? There are spiritual rewards far greater than the promise of land and offspring.

RASHI 15:1 Some time later. The Hebrew more literally says "after these things" (OJPS). But the two Hebrew words for "after" are used differently: *aḥarei* simply means that something happened after something else, but *aḥar,* the word used here, means that there was a connection between the two events. Since a miracle had been done for him to let him kill the kings, Abraham worried, "Perhaps I have now received the reward for all my righteous deeds." That is why the Holy One told him, **Fear not, Abram. I am a shield to you.** I will shield you from suffering punishment for all the people you killed. As for your worries about having already received all your reward, **Your reward shall be very great.**

2 Childless. Menahem b. Saruk understands this word to mean "without heir," the opposite of "descendants" of Mal. 2:12 (just as the same Hebrew verb can mean "to root" or "to uproot"). But I understand Mal. 2:12 to be using the similar-sounding word that means "wake" (as in Song 5:2). I believe our word really means "destruction," as in "*Strip* her, *strip* her to her very foundations!" (Ps. 137:7); "*Raze* it from foundation to top" (Hab. 3:13); "Babylon's broad wall shall be *knocked down*" (Jer. 51:58); and "he has *stripped* its cedarwork bare" (Zeph. 2:14). **The one in charge of my household.** The translation of Onkelos clarifies what it means: "the one in charge of feeding my household." Compare "by

RASHBAM 15:1 Some time later. That is, "after" (OJPS) Abram had killed the kings, the Lord told him not to fear the other nations. **[D]**

[D] See Rashbam's comment to 22:1.

IBN EZRA 15:1 In a vision. A prophetic vision. **I am a shield to you.** Rather, "I have been a shield to you," saving you from the kings, and will further reward you since your spirit moved you to save your nephew with just a few men, relying on Me.

2 Childless. Morphologically, the Hebrew word resembles the adjective "cruel" with its י suffix; note that in the plural (see Lev. 20:20–21) the י drops off. We know the meaning of the word from the Aramaic translation. **The one in charge of my household.** "Charge" here is from the same

KIMHI 15:1 In a vision. Unlike the previous times He spoke with him, this time He did not merely speak but also showed him things. **Very great.** "Great" in this world, and "exceedingly so" (see OJPS) in the World to Come.

2 Lord GOD. "Lord" is a descriptive word; "GOD," representing here the Tetragrammaton, is a proper noun. "Lord" comes first because the description is subordinate to Him, not He to it. In truth, He cannot really be described. When the Tetragrammaton comes before the description, as it sometimes does, this is simply figurative, using human language, since with other things, which can be described, the name generally comes before their (contingent) description. But it is not so with the Holy One. **What can You give me?** He did not ask about his reward in the World to Come; he knew that there would be a good reward for the righteous in the world of souls. But what good would so much great wealth do him in this world if he should die tomorrow? Others would consume it, since he had no son to leave it to. **I shall die childless.** And if my servant inherits my property, what good does that do me? Even though he does what I command him to do, he is not my offspring—yet You promised to give this land to me and my offspring. **The one in charge of my household.** NJPS translates correctly. The word *meshek* is related to *shuk* ("market"), where people are always coming and going. But "coming and

NAHMANIDES 15:1 The word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision. During the day, for the first time; all his previous visions had occurred during the night. Abram saw "the word" in a "vision" in the same sense that "all the people *saw* the thunder" (Exod. 20:15). The secret of both is known to "the learned" (Eccles. 9:11). **Fear not, Abram.** He was afraid of two things: of the kings (or their successors) who might launch greater forces against him, so that he would perish in battle; or that "his time would come and he would die" (1 Sam. 26:10) without offspring. The Lord promised that He would protect him from them and that his reward for following Him would indeed be great.

2 But Abram said, "O Lord GOD, what can You give me?" You have saved me from the kings, but You gave me no promise about not being cut off without offspring. You only said that You would give me great reward. But what good is a reward to me without children? — It never occurred to him that this great reward would be his in the World to Come. That went without saying. For everyone who serves God finds life before Him. But in this world "sometimes an upright man is requited according to the conduct of the scoundrel" (Eccles. 8:14), which is why people need to be reassured. Moreover, "very great" meant that he would receive the "two tables" of B. Ber. 5b—

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS 15:1 The word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision. Prophecy that comes in a vision is of a higher level than prophecy that comes in a dream (Gersonides). Maimonides points out in the *Guide* that this prophecy starts out as a vision but becomes a dream in v. 12. In fact, however, the prophecy ceases after v. 9 and Abraham performs the actions of vv. 10–11 in full possession of his faculties. The dream of v. 12 begins a new prophecy, which ends with v. 16 (Abarbanel). **Fear not, Abram.** You need not fear being punished for helping those wicked sinners from Sodom and Gomorrah (Gersonides). **Your reward shall be very great.** I will give you riches in place of the riches you gave the king of Sodom for My glory (Gersonides).

2 Lord GOD. This combination of divine names is found in the Torah also only in v. 8 and in Deut. 3:24 and 9:26 (Masorah). **I shall die childless.** Rather, "I must go about alone" with no one to protect me (Abarbanel). **The one in charge of my household.** More

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NJPS household is Dammesek Eliezer!" 3Abram said further, "Since You have granted me no offspring, my steward will be my heir." 4The word of the LORD came to him in reply, "That one shall not be your heir; none but your very own issue shall be

דַּמֶּשֶׂק אֱלִיעֶזֶר׃ 3 וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָם הֵן לִי
לֹא נָתַתָּה זָרַע וְהִנֵּה בֶן־בֵּיתִי יוֹרֵשׁ אֹתִי׃
4 וְהִנֵּה דְבַר־יְהוָה אֵלָיו לֵאמֹר לֹא יִירָשְׁךָ
זֶה כִּי־אִם אֲשֶׁר יֵצֵא מִמֵּעֶיךָ הוּא יִירָשֶׁךָ׃

OJPS my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" 3And Abram said: "Behold, to me Thou hast given no seed, and, lo, one born in my house is to be mine heir." 4And, behold, the word of the LORD came unto him, saying: "This man shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of thine own

RASHI your command shall all my people be *directed*" (41:40). He is my administrator. But if I had a son, my son would be in charge of my property. **Dammesek Eliezer.** According to the Targum, this means that Eliezer was from Damascus; the midrash takes it to mean that he pursued the kings as far as Damascus. But the Talmud takes Dammesek as a contraction of *dolehmashkeh*, one who "draws" from the Torah of his master and "waters" others with it.

3 Since You have granted me no offspring. So what good is anything else that You give me?

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why does Abraham speak "further" in v. 3, when he is merely continuing to speak? ✦ Why does Abraham call Eliezer (as he literally does) "son of the acquisition of my house"—especially since 24:2 calls him "the *senior* servant," the opposite of "son"? ✦ Why does Abraham say, "You have granted me no offspring," as if the Holy One had prevented him from having children? It does not sound as if he had much faith!

IBN EZRA geminate root that gives us "It was *amassed* as grasshoppers are *amassed*" (Isa. 33:4)—but in segholate form. **Dammesek Eliezer.** "The one" is doing double duty in this phrase: "The one in charge of my household, *the one* who is from Damascus, is Eliezer." **[K]**

4 Your very own issue. A euphemistic rendering of "he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels" (OJPS), where "bowels" is itself euphemistic for the male member, which is in the same vicinity.

[K] In the long commentary, he decides that "Dammesek" and "Eliezer" are alternate names for the same person.

KIMHI going" is a hendiadys—together, they form the Biblical Hebrew idiom for leadership. **Dammesek Eliezer.** Conceivably the י of the gentilic is missing from the first of these words: "A Damascene, Eliezer." Or he could be calling him "Dammesek/Eliezer," the first being the name he bore when he came to Abram and the second a name that Abram gave him. "Eliezer" is Hebrew, after all. Perhaps Abram sometimes called him by one of the names and sometimes by both. "If at least some member of my family would inherit from me, that would not be so bad; but if some person from Damascus inherits from me, that would be terrible!" That is why Abram continues to talk about this in v. 3.

3 Since You have granted me no offspring. Though You told me, "I will make of you a great nation" (12:2) and "I will make your offspring as the dust of the earth" (13:16). — It is not that Abram said all this to God because he thought (God forbid) that He was lying about these promises. He thought one of two things: either that he had sinned and lost the promise as punishment, or that "offspring" simply meant some member of the family, as in "for the welfare of all his *kindred*" (Esther 10:3), which could mean any member of his extended family, or even someone who merely grew up with him. **My steward will be my heir.** But if "one born in my house" (OJPS) is to be considered my offspring, I can hardly consider what You have given me as worth anything. Yet ever since You gave me that promise, my wife has not been "remembered" with a child.

4 The word of the LORD came to him in reply. Make no mistake, I did indeed mean "offspring" in the literal sense.

NAHMANIDES everything good that the completely righteous deserve, without any punishment whatsoever. **[O]** And of course that promise was in response to what he most feared. V. 5 makes that explicit. You may well wonder about this, since Abraham has already been promised, "I give all the land that you see to you and your offspring forever. I will make your offspring as the dust of the earth, so that if one can count the dust of the earth, then your offspring too can be counted" (13:15–16). So how can he now complain, "I shall die childless"? Why did he not believe in the previous prophecy, as he will believe in the prophecy given in this chapter? The answer is that the righteous do not trust themselves not to sin inadvertently: "I may decree that a nation or a kingdom shall be built and planted; but if it does what is displeasing to Me and does not obey Me, then I change My mind concerning the good I planned to bestow upon it" (Jer. 18:9–10). Abraham saw himself getting older without the prophecy being fulfilled, and thought that his sins had deprived him of the bounty that the Holy One planned to bestow on him. Perhaps, as the Sages say, he thought now that he would be punished for the people he had killed in the war. As Genesis Rabbah says of the verse "Jacob was greatly frightened" (32:8): "The righteous have no guarantee in this world." **I shall die childless.** The Hebrew literally says "I go hence" (OJPS) childless, which some indeed explain to mean "I am *going* to die," along the lines of "man *goes* to his eternal abode" (Eccles. 12:5). But I think he is simply saying, "I go from place to place, childless [*ariri*] and alone in a strange land 'like a bush [*ar'ar*] in the desert' [Jer. 17:6]. No one enters my home but Eliezer, a stranger whom I got from Damascus, neither a relative nor a countryman of mine." Only in v. 3 does he relate not having children to what will happen when he dies.

3 Since You have granted me no offspring, my steward will be my heir. And I am punished by being deprived of the reward You originally promised me.

4 The word of the LORD came to him in reply. Suddenly, while the words of v. 3 were still in his mouth. **That one shall not be your heir.** This promise is not about the son, but about the inheritance. Since the son who would actually be his heir would not be born until he was old, He reassured him: There was no need to worry about the inheritance. His own offspring would be his heir.

[O] The "two tables" are interpreted as referring to this world and the World to Come.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS precisely, "the one who *runs* my household," which is the correct derivation from Isa. 33:4 (Gersonides). Even more literally, "the *son* who runs my household"—the only "son" I have is not free to go about with me, but must remain at home to run the household (Abarbanel). **Dammesek Eliezer.** The grandson of Nimrod (Hizkuni). Being from Damascus, he was of the cursed seed of Canaan (Gersonides). Being a slave, he was known by his home town, not by a patronymic (Sforno).

3 Abram said further. "Further" is not in the text (see OJPS); it expresses the pause that interrupted the two statements, as indicated by the repetition of "Abram said." See similarly 30:27–28, Exod. 1:15–16, and many other cases (Hizkuni). Abraham fell silent at the end of v. 2 to await the Lord's answer; but He said nothing, forcing Abraham to make his request explicit (Abarbanel).

4 The word of the LORD came to him. The Hebrew phrasing occurs also only with Elijah in 1 Kings 19:9 (Masorah).

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NJPS your heir." [5]He took him outside and said, "Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them." And He added, "So shall your offspring be." [6]And because he put his trust in the LORD, He reckoned it to his merit.

OJPS bowels shall be thine heir." [5]And He brought him forth abroad, and said: "Look now toward heaven, and count the stars, if thou be able to count them"; and He said unto him: "So shall thy seed be." [6]And he believed in the LORD; and He counted it to him for righteousness.

5 וַיּוֹצֵא אֹתוֹ הַחוּצָה וַיֹּאמֶר הַבֶּט־נָא
הַשָּׁמַיְמָה וּסְפֹר הַכּוֹכָבִים אִם־תּוּכַל
לִסְפֹּר אֹתָם וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ כֹּה יִהְיֶה זַרְעֶךָ׃
6 וְהֶאֱמִן בַּיהוָה וַיַּחְשְׁבֶהָ לּוֹ צְדָקָה׃

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why did the Holy One "take [Abraham] outside"? We did not know he was inside! A "vision" is not really about going from place to place. Let Him just say, "Look toward heaven." ✦ How could the Holy One tell Abraham to "count the stars" when seven verses later, in v. 12, the sun is about to set? Is it day or night? ✦ This time, Abraham "put his trust in the LORD" (v. 6). Didn't he put his trust in the Lord the previous times? ✦ Why did He "reckon it to [Abraham's] merit"?

RASHI **5 He took him outside.** The straightforward sense is that He took him out of his tent so that he could see the stars. But the midrash reads it as follows. "He told him: Get *out* of the astrological fate that you read in the stars—that you would not produce a son. Abram will not have a son, but Abraham will have one. Sarai will not give birth, but Sarah will. I am renaming you, and your fates will change as a result." Another reading: he took him outside the vault of heaven and elevated him above the stars. **Look toward heaven.** Matching the second reading in the previous comment, the Hebrew verb means "to look down from above."

IBN EZRA **6 His merit.** As the same word is used in "It will be therefore to our *merit* before the LORD our God to observe faithfully this whole Instruction" (Deut. 6:25). But Jewish tradition uses this word *tzedakah* to mean "charity."

RASHBAM **6 He reckoned it to his merit.** Rather, "he [Abraham] took it as charitable of Him," giving him something he did not deserve by his own merits. That is the straightforward sense of the text.

6 He put his trust in the LORD. He did not ask Him for a sign confirming this promise; "how shall I know" (v. 8) is only about the promise of the land (but see my comment there). **He reckoned it to his merit.** The translations understand correctly. **[N]**

[N] One version of Rashi's comment says "merit"; another, "righteousness."

KIMHI **5 He took him outside.** The prophecy started inside his tent. He "took him outside" in a prophetic vision, just as happened to Ezekiel: "A spirit lifted me up between heaven and earth and brought me in visions of God to Jerusalem" (Ezek. 8:3). **Look toward heaven and count the stars.** Previously He compared them to the dust of the earth and now to the stars; both expressions are rhetorical. See my comments to 13:16. Here He alludes to the time of the Messiah, when no human being would any longer have power over Abram's descendants, who would themselves be a kind of light to the world.

6 He put his trust in the LORD. He had done so previously as well, but with the doubt that we described above. But now he trusted Him completely, with no doubts whatsoever. **He reckoned it to his merit.** After all, he and his wife were getting older and the promise was still delayed, yet Abram nonetheless put his trust in Him.

NAHMANIDES **5 He took him outside.** Despite what Rashi says, "Abram" did indeed father a son: Ishmael. The point of the midrash is that Abram was asking for a son who would be his heir, and the Holy One told him, "That one shall not be your heir. Forget about the fate assigned you by the stars. 'Abram' will not father an heir, but 'Abraham' will." And perhaps the astrological fate was about the couple: Abram and Sarai would not have an heir together, but Abraham and Sarah would. But I think the line about Sarah in the midrash is extraneous, indicating that it would apply to her too. The Holy One is not promising him anything about Sarah right now. As late as 17:17, Abraham still does not believe that Sarah will give birth.

6 And because he put his trust in the LORD, He reckoned it to his merit. Despite Rashi's comment, I don't understand what great merit it was in him [causing him] to "believe" (as OJPS correctly translates) what the Holy One said. Why would he not believe in "the true God" (Isa. 65:16)? After all, he himself was the prophet through whom this promise was given; and "God is not man to be capricious" (Num. 23:19). Besides, someone who trusted God enough to slaughter his beloved only son, not to mention all the other trials—why would he not believe a promise of reward? What I think is that the second half of the verse means something completely different: "He"—Abram—"thought it righteousness in Him." That is, he thought that through the righteousness of the Holy One He would give him offspring no matter what, without regard to Abram's own righteousness and not as a reward. Before this promise He had already said, "Your reward shall be very great" (v. 1), but now, reward or no, Abram would no longer have to fear that sin might cause him not to have offspring. Even though he originally thought that offspring were a conditional promise, as a reward for his actions, now that he had been told not to fear, he understood that "the matter had been determined by God" (41:32), "a firm oath that He would not renounce" (Ps. 132:11). It was a matter of the Lord's righteousness and was irreversible: "By Myself have I sworn, from My mouth has issued righteousness, a word that shall not turn back" (Isa. 45:23). **[P]** Or the second half of the verse could mean "He reckoned it righteousness in

[P] In our texts of Nahmanides, two words have crept in that make the first part of the quotation sound as if it came from Gen. 22:16.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **5 He took him outside.** And showed him the stars during the daytime (Bekhor Shor). So it appeared in his dream (Hizkuni). Another way of understanding the Hebrew words—ignoring the vowel under the ו—is that the Holy One is saying to them: "He [the son I will give you] will remove him [Eliezer] from the position of heir." But the straightforward sense is that the narrative is telling us that Abraham had to be outside because the covenant between the pieces could hardly occur indoors (Abarbanel). **Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them.** In Abraham's day the number of the stars was not known (Gersonides). Saul and David both counted the men of military age, but no one ever succeeded in counting the entire nation. As for the stars, it is true that scientists have counted them and found 1,022 of them—but that is only the visible stars. The stars that are not visible can most certainly not be counted (Abarbanel).

6 And because he put his trust in the LORD. Grammatically the Hebrew must mean, "And he [the "offspring" of v. 5] will put his trust in the LORD" (Abarbanel). Abram trusted the Lord to do what He said, no matter how unlikely or impossible it seemed (Sforno). **He reckoned it to his merit.** Abram took it as righteousness on God's part because he knew he had in fact earned the right to be under the care of divine providence (Gersonides). He certainly deserved a son; this was the promise made to him in 12:2 (Abarbanel).

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NJPS 7Then He said to him, "I am the LORD who brought you out from Ur of the Chaldeans to assign this land to you as a possession." 8And he said, "O Lord GOD, how shall I know that I am to possess it?" 9He answered, "Bring Me a three-year-old heifer, a three-year-old she-goat, a three-year-old ram, a

OJPS 7And He said unto him: "I am the LORD that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give thee this land to inherit it." 8And he said: "O Lord GOD, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?" 9And He said unto him: "Take Me a heifer of three years old, and a she-goat of three years old, and a ram of three years old, and a turtle-dove, and a

ז וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו אֲנִי יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ ✦ מֵאוּר כַּשְׂדִּים לָתֶת לְךָ אֶת־הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת לְרִשְׁתָּהּ׃ ח וַיֹּאמֶר אֲדֹנָי יֱהוִה בַּמָּה אֵדַע כִּי אִירָשֶׁנָּה׃ ט וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו קְחָה לִי עֶגְלָה מְשֻׁלֶּשֶׁת וְעֵז מְשֻׁלֶּשֶׁת וְאַיִל מְשֻׁלָּשׁ וְתֹר

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ What is the meaning of "I am the LORD" (v. 7)? If it was simply to identify Himself, shouldn't He have done this in v. 1? ✦ Is "who brought you out from Ur of the Chaldeans" really the most appropriate identifier? ✦ Why does Abraham ask about the land "How shall I know that I am to possess it?" (v. 8) and not ask about offspring? (I am absolutely amazed at the commentators who think they have answered this question.) ✦ Why does Abraham ask for a sign only now and not previously? Or is that even what he means by "how shall I know"? Isn't what Abraham really wants is for the Holy One to swear to him or to make a covenant with him? ✦ Does the expression "three-year-old" really mean that? "Year" appears nowhere in the Hebrew, so couldn't this expression mean to bring three of each animal? ✦ Why did the turtledove and the bird (v. 9) not have to be "three" like the animals? (If it does refer to age, they could be three months old or three weeks old.)

RASHI **8 How shall I know that I am to possess it?** Another way to understand this question: For which particular merit will my descendants be established in the land? The Holy One replied, "For the merit of the sacrificial offerings."

9 A three-year-old heifer. Rather, a "triple" heifer—three of them, alluding to the bull used on the Day of Atonement, the

KIMHI **7 Then He said to him.** To confirm Abram's belief in the promise still more. **I am the LORD.** He had not yet spoken this name to Abram. But He did not do so now to reveal it to him; Abram had known this name since the day he acknowledged the Lord. Rather, He mentioned it to confirm the promise, as if to say, "I swear by My Name." **Who brought you out.** I did not bring you out for no reason, but to give you and your descendants this land.

8 How shall I know that I am to possess it? That is, "that my son will possess it," just as Jacob calls the land his descendants would conquer the portion "which *I* wrested from the Amorites" (48:22). Being confident that his descendants would indeed obtain possession of the land, what Abraham was now asking about was whether they would possess it forever or whether they might sin and then be exiled from it. He was asking for a further prophecy of the kind he had already had.

9 Bring Me. Offer them up to Me, and by this means I will offer a hint about your descendants' settling in the land and being exiled from it. But I will make an unshakeable

RASHBAM **7 I am the LORD who brought you out from Ur of the Chaldeans.** As we see from "the sun was about to set" (v. 12), this passage takes place during the daytime; since Abram has just been told to "count the stars" (v. 5), the previous passage takes place at night. Just because a passage comes later in the text does not mean that it happened later.

IBN EZRA **7 Who brought you out from Ur of the Chaldeans.** Further proof that the command to Abraham to "go forth" (12:1) was issued to him while he was still in Ur (as I explained in my comment to that verse), not in Haran.

8 O Lord GOD, how shall I know that I am to possess it? Abram "believed" the Lord (see OJPS to v. 6) that his own son would be his heir, but with regard to possessing the land, he asked for a sign, just as did Gideon. **[L]** An oath sworn by the Lord would make the promise unconditional. For as a rule all prophecies—like the one Abram had received—are conditional. And there was nothing sinful in Abram's requesting that He make a covenant with him.

9 A three-year-old she-goat. Some say the Hebrew really means "three she-goats."

[L] See Judges 6.

NAHMANIDES Him[self]" to have promised Abraham offspring, as in "God *intended* it for good" (50:20), using the same Hebrew verb as in our phrase. I would interpret Ps. 106:31 the same way.

7 I am the LORD who brought you out from Ur of the Chaldeans to assign this land to you as a possession. As I have already explained in my comment to 11:28, He is saying: "From the moment I miraculously brought you forth from Ur, it was My intention to give you this land." But He had not yet issued this decree, so Abraham was still worried that the gift was conditional on his deeds, even though the Holy One had already told him twice, in 12:7 and 13:15, that He would give the land to his offspring. He had now issued a decree about offspring, but not about giving him the land.

8 How shall I know that I am to possess it? He does not ask for a sign, nor does the Holy One give him a sign (as happens in other cases). Abraham wanted to know for certain that his sin or that of his offspring would not prevent them from possessing the land. Or the Canaanites might repent, in which case the following would apply to them: "At one moment I may decree that a nation or a kingdom shall be uprooted and pulled down and destroyed; but if that nation against which I made the decree turns back from its wickedness, I change My mind concerning the punishment I planned to bring on it" (Jer. 18:7–8). So the Holy One made a covenant with him that his offspring would possess the land no matter what.

9 A three-year-old heifer. The translations follow Ibn Ezra's explanation that these animals are three years old. But Onkelos says that there were three of each, and that is correct. A three-year-old can no longer really be called a heifer. As the Sages say, "A two-year-old

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **7 I am the LORD who brought you out from Ur of the Chaldeans.** The precise verb form is found also only in "I the LORD am your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt" of Exod. 20:2 and Deut. 5:6 (Masorah). This "covenant between the pieces" took place five years *earlier* than the conversation at the beginning of the chapter. Since the "four hundred years" of v. 13 date from the birth of Isaac and the Israelites departed Egypt "at the end of the four hundred and thirtieth year, to the very day" (Exod. 12:41), this covenant dates to 30 years before Isaac's birth. Abraham was therefore 70 at the time, and this covenant must have occurred the *first* time Abraham left Haran, five years before 12:4, when he left Haran for a *second* time, at the age of 75. See the chronology in Seder Olam. The passage was inserted here to keep the passages about the promise of offspring to Abraham together (Hizkuni). Since this occurred 30 years before Isaac was born, the 400 years could not possibly (despite Seder Olam) have begun with his birth; see v. 13. In fact, this prophecy must have taken place quite close to Sarai's giving Hagar to Abram (Gersonides).

8 How shall I know that I am to possess it? The promises have been confusing up to this point; Abraham is asking whether he will possess the land himself, or whether it will be possessed only by his offspring. This is undoubtedly the correct interpretation (Abarbanel).

9 Three-year-old. Because of the similar-sounding word meaning "officers" in Exod. 14:7, some take this word as an indicator of

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NJPS turtledove, and a young bird." [10]He brought Him all these and cut them in two, placing each half opposite the other; but he did not cut

וְגוֹזָֽל׃ 10 וַיִּקַּח־לוֹ אֶת־כָּל־אֵ֨לֶּה וַיְבַתֵּ֜ר
אֹתָ֤ם בַּתָּוֶךְ֙ וַיִּתֵּ֣ן אִישׁ־בִּתְרוֹ֔ לִקְרַ֖את

OJPS young pigeon." [10]And he took him all these, and divided them in the midst, and laid each half over against the other; but the birds

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ If cutting the animals in two is what creates the covenant, as Jer. 34:18 makes it seem, why is it that "he did not cut up the bird" (v. 10)?

RASHI one used to atone for the sin of the whole community of Israel, and the "unworked heifer" that atones for an unsolved murder. **[O] A three-year-old she-goat.** The triple reference is to the goat whose blood is brought inside the curtain, the additional goat offerings on festivals, and the goat that atones for an individual. **[P] A three-year-old ram.** Alluding to the guilt offering, the offering for uncertain guilt, and the sheep that can be used to atone for an individual. **[Q] A young bird.** A pigeon.

10 Cut them in two. This is what "dividing" them means. Whatever it may mean midrashically, the biblical text never abandons its straightforward meaning. He was going

[O] See Leviticus 16, Lev. 4:13–21, and Deut. 21:1–9, respectively. **[P]** See Leviticus 16, Numbers 28–29, and Lev. 4:27–31, respectively. **[Q]** For the first two, see Leviticus 5; for the latter, see Lev. 4:32–35.

RASHBAM **10 And cut them in two.** So that the Holy One could "pass between those pieces" (v. 17). Such cutting gives us

IBN EZRA But I think it does indeed refer to a three-year-old. **Ram.** Full grown. **A young bird.** A pigeon. For all the others in the verse are those creatures, and those only, from which offerings may be brought.

10 Cut them in two. He cut them and separated them, "like the calf which they cut in two so as to pass between *the halves*" (Jer. 34:18). **Placing each half opposite the other.** The word *ish*, elsewhere "a person," can refer simply to the essence of a thing, in this case, "each" half. It can be

KIMHI covenant with you. **A three-year-old heifer, a three-year-old she-goat, a three-year-old ram.** The three kinds of animals with which sacrifices are made. He was hinting that as long as they offered the proper sacrifices they would not be exiled. The "threes" in this expression allude to the three exiles Abram's descendants were to suffer, an allusion also found in "You have fed them tears as their daily bread, made them drink tears by threes" (Ps. 80:6). The heifer alludes to the exile to Egypt: "Egypt is a handsome heifer" (Jer. 46:20). They were indeed sent there from Canaan, where they would already have been ruling had not "the iniquity of the Amorites" (v. 16) been incomplete. The she-goat and the ram refer to Babylonia and to Rome, the fourth kingdom, **[E]** the exile we are in today. (Though the Greeks—the third kingdom—persecuted them, they did not exile them. They are part of this image nonetheless, since they are described in Daniel 8 as a goat. The troubles of Second Temple times began with them and were completed by the Romans.) The ram also alludes to the Medes and Persians. **[F]** Even though they were the ones who released them from exile, some of their kings lengthened the exile and prevented the returnees from rebuilding Jerusalem and the Temple. But they are rewarded to the extent of being symbolized here with a male animal rather than a female one. For they did not claim the glory for themselves, but attributed it to God. As King Cyrus said: "The LORD God of Heaven has given me all the kingdoms of the earth" (2 Chron. 36:23). Contrast the king of Assyria, who said, "By the might of my hand have I wrought it" (Isa. 10:13)—not to mention Titus. **[G] A young bird.** We are not told what species of bird; the Hebrew word can refer to any: "Like an eagle who rouses his *nestlings*" (Deut. 32:11). But Onkelos is certainly right that the pigeon is intended, since like the turtledove it is not a bird of prey but is preyed upon. The turtledove and the pigeon, the two birds that may be brought as offerings, both form natural partnerships. The female, if her husband dies, never has intercourse with another male. Israel in exile is just that way—like a widow whose husband has parted from her, though in this case He is alive and well. Israel never served other gods while in exile. No matter how hopelessly long the exile lasted, we never "forgot the name of our God and spread forth our hands to a foreign god" (Ps. 44:21). The turtledove and the nestling are further symbolic of Israel in that Israel, for their sins, are trampled **[H]** under the feet of the nations at most times until the coming of the Messiah. Both of these birds are used to symbolize Israel: "Ah, you are fair, my darling, ah, you are fair. Your eyes are like doves" (Song 4:1); "O my dove, in the cranny of the rocks" (Song 2:14); "Do not deliver Your dove to the wild beast" (Ps. 74:19). **[I]**

10 He . . . cut them in two. In this way He alluded to the internal battles (both cultural and military) that would lead to the ultimate disintegration of the nations that persecute Israel. They would finish each other off. **But he did not cut up the bird.** Not so with Israel—

[E] See Daniel 7. **[F]** "Also" is not in Kimhi's comment. Our texts may be confused, since he has already mentioned the ram in connection with Rome, which succeeded Persia. **[G]** The Roman general, later emperor, who destroyed the Second Temple. **[H]** The same Hebrew verb as "preyed upon." **[I]** The first two verses use the word "pigeon," which in Biblical Hebrew can refer also to a "dove"; the third uses "turtledove."

NAHMANIDES is still a heifer; a three-year-old is a cow" (M. Par. 1:1). The three animals correspond to the three kinds of sacrifices his descendants would make: whole offerings, sin offerings, and sacrifices of well-being. (A guilt offering is just a sin offering with a different name.) But the word could also mean that the animals were to be offered "in triplicate," that is, each species should be offered three at a time, like the upper, middle, and lower "tiers" of Ezek. 42:6 (which uses the same word). **A young bird.** This was a pigeon, of which only the young may be offered. Even though the Hebrew word may be used for young birds of any kind (see Deut. 32:11), Abraham understood on his own which species was meant—or else he simply decided to use a pigeon and the text chose forever the species that had been offered by our ancestor. In any case, Abraham understood that these would be the offerings, and that all offerings must be dismembered—whole offerings into their sections, offerings of well-being to provide the priests with the breast and thigh, and sin and guilt offerings (like offerings of well-being) so that the sacrificial fats can be burnt.

10 Cut them in two. To "cut" a deal with him—a covenant—by passing between these pieces. He is also hinting to Abraham that these are the animals and birds from which sacrifices were to be offered. **But he did not cut up the bird.** He set the turtledove and the

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS importance, which in the case of a sacrificial animal would mean "fat" (Bekhor Shor). The "fat" meaning is clear from "Eglathshelishiah," the fatted calf of Jer. 48:34 (Hizkuni). These animals are at their best when they are three years old. Rashi's notion that this word could mean three animals is a midrash (Gersonides). One way to understand these animals is that they represent the three Patriarchs: representing Abraham, the heifer, recalling the calf of 18:7; representing Isaac, the ram of 22:13; and representing Jacob, the goat of 27:9. This is what makes them a "triple" set of animals, as the Hebrew is really saying. The Holy One is telling Abraham that the land will not come into his possession in his own days, nor in those of his son or his grandson (Abarbanel). **A turtledove, and a young bird.** These represent Moses and Joshua, who *will* begin to take possession of the land (Abarbanel).

10 But he did not cut up the bird. Of which there were two, so he simply put them opposite each other (Hizkuni).

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NJPS up the bird. [11]Birds of prey came down upon the carcasses, and Abram drove them away. [12]As the sun was about to set, a deep sleep fell upon Abram, and a

OJPS divided he not. [11]And the birds of prey came down upon the carcasses, and Abram drove them away. [12]And it came to pass, that, when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and,

רֵעֵהוּ וְאֶת־הַצִּפֹּר לֹא בָתָר׃ 11 וַיֵּרֶד הָעַיִט
עַל־הַפְּגָרִים וַיַּשֵּׁב אֹתָם אַבְרָם׃ 12 וַיְהִי
הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ לָבוֹא וְתַרְדֵּמָה נָפְלָה עַל־אַבְרָם

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ How could Abraham drive "them" away (v. 11), when according to the Hebrew there was just *one* bird of prey? ✦ What was the point of driving it/them away to begin with, when Abraham would sooner or later go home and leave the animals to be eaten as carrion anyway? ✦ Why are we told that "the sun was about to set" (v. 12), when we have never been told this before about any prophecy Abraham received?

RASHI to "cut" a covenant with Abraham (as v. 18 literally says), and it was customary for those who cut a deal to cut an animal in half and pass between the two pieces: "all the people of the land who passed between the halves of the calf" (Jer. 34:19). The "smoking oven" and "flaming torch" of v. 17 are representative of the Shekhinah, which is fire. **But he did not cut up the bird**. For the other nations are symbolized by bulls, rams, and goats, as in the "bulls . . . of Bashan" (Ps. 22:13) and "the two-horned ram that . . . [signifies] the kings of Media and Persia; and the buck, the he-goat—the king of Greece" (Dan. 8:20–21). But Israel is symbolized by a dove: "O my dove, in the cranny of the rocks" (Song 2:14). Dividing the animals hinted that eventually the other nations would come to an end, but that Israel would exist forever.

11 Birds of prey. The Hebrew word for these birds is derived from a verb meaning to "swoop," since these birds swoop down on the remains: "Why did you disobey the LORD and *swoop down* on the spoil?" (1 Sam. 15:19); "Like an eagle *swooping* onto its prey" (Job 9:26). **Upon the carcasses**. That is, the animals that had been split apart. Some Aramaic versions actually translate it as "the split ones," but this is misreading פגל for פלג, which literally does mean "to split." **[R]** Our word is really related to *piggul* of "it is an *offensive thing*" (Lev. 19:7). **Drove them away**. Literally, he "blew" them away, as wind blows: "He causes His wind to blow" (Ps. 147:18). This is an allusion to David, **[S]** who will come to blow away the nations—though Heaven will not permit this until the advent of the King Messiah.

12 A great dark dread descended upon him. Symbolic of the dark troubles of the various periods of exile.

[R] See "Peleg" of Gen. 10:25 and the comments about that verse. The word in our verse has *r* instead of *l*, but this is a standard linguistic variation. **[S]** Via a midrash on the "birds of prey" in Jer. 12:9.

RASHBAM the word for "covenant"; compare the verb in "*cut* them down with their swords" (Ezek. 23:47).

11 Birds of prey came down upon the carcasses, and Abram drove them away. He did this all day long, until evening. We are told this to demonstrate Abram's thoughtfulness and the trouble he took.

IBN EZRA used not only for people, but also for animals or even for objects; see Exod. 26:3, where the feminine form of the word is used to say that the cloths that make up the Tabernacle are to be joined "each" to the other. Here too "each" half is placed opposite its other half—for humans and animals are both bilaterally symmetric. **[M] But he did not cut up the bird**. Rather, "the poultry," a collective noun including both the turtledove and the pigeon.

11 Birds of prey. Another collective noun: "Let the *birds of prey* surround her!" (Jer. 12:9). **The carcasses**. The (whole) bodies, those of the birds. **Drove them away**. With *dagesh* in the ש replacing the assimilated נ of נשב, "causing a wind to blow on them" that drove them away; or perhaps he "moved them"—the carcasses—"around" (from שוב) to drive away the birds. **[N]**

12 As the sun was about to set. This is a sign for us that "He brought Him all

[M] Others understand Ibn Ezra to be saying that they are ordinarily "two" separate things, which is why the usage here demanded comment. But some texts of this comment say they are "equal" (one letter different from "two" in Hebrew); this too could mean that they are symmetric, or that they are equal with regard to the term *ish*. **[N]** Since the *dagesh* contradicts this interpretation, what Ibn Ezra really means is unclear.

KIMHI despite a moment of war between Ephraim and Judah there were no cultural differences between them. In messianic times there will be no competition between them at all: "Ephraim shall not envy Judah, and Judah shall not harass Ephraim" (Isa. 11:13). That is why he did not cut up either of the birds, which represent Israel, who are scattered to the four winds but continue to share a single Torah all the way from east to west, which they never altered no matter the pressure of exile. And both cutting the animals and not cutting the birds were done at the Holy One's command, though the text does not say so.

11 Abram drove them away. The implication was that in every generation the nations would arise against us to destroy us, but the Holy One would save us from their hand due to the merit of Abraham: "Even then, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not reject them or spurn them so as to destroy them, annulling My covenant with them: for I the LORD am their God. I will remember in their favor the covenant with the ancients" (Lev. 26:44–45).

12 As the sun was about to set. The discrepancy between this and showing him the stars in v. 5 proves that all this was a prophetic vision. The sun being about to set—the time when the light grows ever darker—alluded to the first exile, the exile to Egypt. **A deep sleep**

NAHMANIDES pigeon opposite each other, for they too were part of the covenant. But he did not cut them in two, since a bird offering is supposed to be torn open "without severing it" (Lev. 1:17). **[Q]** Genesis Rabbah explains the wording of our verse—that he did not cut up the (one) bird—to mean that the Holy One conveyed to him that one kind of bird offering, a whole offering, is cut up, but the other kind, the sin offering, is not.

11 Birds of prey came down upon the carcasses. To eat them, as birds of prey do. **Abram drove them away**. The Holy One hinted to him that the other nations would come and try to abolish the offerings, but that Abraham's offspring would chase them off.

12 A great dark dread descended upon him. The four parts of this expression—great, dark, dread, and descended—have been interpreted as a reference to the enslavement of the four periods of exile. The dread (to take them in the order Abram encountered them,

[Q] See Rashi's comment to that phrase, there and in Lev. 5:8.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **11 Birds of prey**. They symbolized the nations that would afflict Abram's descendants and try to interfere with the covenant (Gersonides). Like the birds in the chief baker's dream of 40:16–19, they are symbolic of death (Abarbanel). **Abram drove them away**. Rather, he "returned" the turtledove and the other bird, releasing them into the open country. But another way of understanding this episode is that the three animals symbolize the three shepherds who brought Israel out of Egypt: Miriam, Aaron, and Moses. In this case the birds represent Joshua and Eliezer the priest (Abarbanel).

12 As the sun was about to set, a deep sleep fell upon Abram. Apparently this took place the day after the nighttime battle against the kings, on the evening of the day when he ate with Melchizedek. He fell asleep because he had not slept at all the previous

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NJPS great dark dread descended upon him. 13And He said to Abram, "Know well that your offspring shall be strangers in a land not theirs, and they shall be enslaved and oppressed four

OJPS lo, a dread, even a great darkness, fell upon him. 13And He said unto Abram: "Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred

וְהִנֵּה אֵימָה חֲשֵׁכָה גְדֹלָה נֹפֶלֶת עָלָיו׃
13 וַיֹּאמֶר לְאַבְרָם יָדֹעַ תֵּדַע כִּי־גֵר | יִהְיֶה
זַרְעֲךָ בְּאֶרֶץ לֹא לָהֶם וַעֲבָדוּם וְעִנּוּ אֹתָם

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ What did Abraham do to have his offspring be punished by making them "be enslaved and oppressed" (v. 13)? ✦ Why is Abraham told that the oppression will last "four hundred years" when it really lasted only 210 years? (For that matter, it also conflicts with the statement in Exod. 12:40 that "the length of time that the Israelites lived in Egypt was four hundred and thirty years.")

RASHI **13 A land not theirs.** This does *not* say "the land of Egypt," merely "a land not theirs." For after the birth of Isaac (see my next comment), "Abraham *resided* in the land" (21:34); Isaac was told to "*reside* in this land" (26:3); "Jacob *sojourned* in the land of Ham" (Ps. 105:23); and his sons said, "We have come to *sojourn* in this land" (47:4). **[T] Four hundred years.** From the birth of Isaac until the Israelites finally leave Egypt. Isaac was 60 when Jacob was born. When Jacob went down to Egypt, he said, "The years of my sojourn [on earth] are one hundred and thirty" (47:9), making 190. They were in Egypt for 210 years, as hinted by the verb "go down" (42:2), **[U]** making a total of 400. If you imagine that they were actually in Egypt for the whole 400 years, look: Kohath was one of those who went down to Egypt. Do the math. Kohath lived to 133 and his son Amram to 137. **[V]** Add 80, Moses' age when the Israelites left Egypt, and even then you only get 350—from which you would still have to subtract all the years Kohath lived after Amram was born and the years Amram lived after Moses was born.

[T] The Hebrew verb (which is the same in all four verses) means "to reside" as opposed to settling down permanently. **[U]** The numerical value of this word רדו is 210. **[V]** See Exod. 6:18 and 20.

RASHBAM **13 Four hundred years.** "Four hundred thirty years" (Exod. 12:40) from this moment of the covenant between the pieces in Genesis 15. The 400 years will begin with Isaac. **[E]**

[E] See Rashbam's comment to Exod. 12:40.

IBN EZRA these" (v. 10) the next day, after Abram had awoken from his prophetic dream.

13 Know well that your offspring shall be strangers. In Hebrew, the man who has a family is called *ezraḥ*, as in "like a robust *native tree*" (Ps. 37:35), because he is attached to his roots. A *ger* ("stranger") is like a *garger*, a "berry" that has been cut off the bough. Some mindless people find this explanation implausible; if only they indeed understood the Hebrew letters, they would recognize the truth. For the shapes of the letters are meaningful. **Four hundred years.** From today.

KIMHI **fell upon Abram.** As a result of the prophecy. The same happened to Daniel: "When he spoke with me, I was overcome by a deep sleep" (Dan. 8:18). **A great dark dread descended upon him.** This too happened to Daniel: "He came near to where I was standing, and as he came I was terrified" (Dan. 8:17). This is sometimes the nature of prophecy. During the first part of the prophecy, none of this happened to Abram, for that was all good news. But now He was going to tell him how difficult the distress of the exile would be.

13 Strangers in a land not theirs. It never was, and it never would be. **Four hundred years.** Starting from the birth of Isaac, 30 years after this vision. We count only 25 of them, however, since the vision took place in Canaan and "Abram was seventy-five years old when he left Haran" (12:4) and 100 when Isaac was born. I suppose we might say that the extra 5 years date from the time, back in Ur, when the Lord told him to "go forth" (12:1). The 400 years cannot possibly all have taken place in Egypt, if you figure out the chronology. Nonetheless, they were always "strangers," Isaac in the land of the Philistines and Jacob in Aram and afterward in Egypt.

NAHMANIDES as noted in the Hebrew text) was interpreted as a reference to Babylonia; the darkness, to Persia, which darkened the eyes of Israel through fasting; **[R]** the darkness becoming great, to Antiochus; the descending upon him, to Edom. **[S]** When the Holy One gave the land to Abraham, He was (as it were) retaining the right to the following proviso: if they should sin before Him, there would be four periods of exile when these nations would enslave them and occupy their land. V. 13 will explicitly announce yet another exile, the first, to Egypt, with which (as I explained in my comment to 12:10) he had already been punished.

13 Know well that your offspring shall be strangers. The Hebrew punctuation, which keeps "four hundred years" separate, shows what the verse really implies: "Know well that your offspring shall be strangers in a land not theirs four hundred years, and they shall be enslaved and oppressed"—for how long, it does not say. There are many verses in the Bible whose clear meaning emerges only from a rearrangement of the words; see, e.g., the Hebrew of 39:17, 41:57, Exod. 12:15, Isa. 2:20, Ps. 66:16, Hosea 8:2, Mal. 3:17, and many others. As for our verse, if Ibn Ezra is correct, He was telling him when the redemption would come but not how long the exile would last—which is also correct.

[R] Presumably a reference to Esther 4. **[S]** Antiochus, the king at the time of the first Hanukkah, represents the Greek era; Edom symbolizes Rome.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS night. Otherwise, he would not have fallen asleep so early (Gersonides). In between the prophecy that ended with v. 9 and the one that begins here, the Holy One left Abraham to spend the rest of the day, until evening, pondering what he had heard in the first prophecy—of which he had understood nothing (Abarbanel).

13 Know well that your offspring shall be strangers. Using language corresponding to his sin of asking (in v. 8), "How shall I know?" (Hizkuni). If we must attribute this to sin, it is much more obvious that it should be the sin of Jacob's sons against their brother Joseph. There is no need to be surprised at the Holy One's decreeing a punishment for a sin that has not been committed yet. But the larger purpose was to refine the people as one smelts silver, removing filth and impurity from them, and to display God's reality and His might (Abarbanel). **Four hundred years.** Until the end of a 400-year period beginning with the birth of Jacob, the first of the Patriarchs who was constantly "a stranger in a land not his." But the Holy One actually cut this period short—by 45 years according to one calculation, meaning that even after the extra 40 years in the desert the Israelites reached the land 5 years early (Gersonides).

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NJPS hundred years; [14]but I will execute judgment on the nation they shall serve, and in the end they shall go free with great wealth. [15]As for you,

You shall go to your fathers in peace;
You shall be buried at a ripe old age.

OJPS years; [14]and also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge; and afterward shall they come out with great substance. [15]But

thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace;
thou shalt be buried in a good old age.

אַרְבַּע מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה׃ [14] וְגַם אֶת־הַגּוֹי אֲשֶׁר
יַעֲבֹדוּ דָּן אָנֹכִי וְאַחֲרֵי־כֵן יֵצְאוּ בִּרְכֻשׁ
גָּדוֹל׃ [15] וְאַתָּה
תָּבוֹא אֶל־אֲבֹתֶיךָ בְּשָׁלוֹם
תִּקָּבֵר בְּשֵׂיבָה טוֹבָה׃

RASHI **14 I will execute judgment.** By means of the Ten Plagues. **On the nation they shall serve.** The Hebrew literally says, "also" on that nation (see OJPS), including along with them the four kingdoms of Daniel 8. They too will come to an end, for having enslaved the Jews. **With great wealth.** As indeed happened: "they stripped the Egyptians" (Exod. 12:36).

15 You shall go. You will not see all this. **To your fathers.** His father was an idolater, and the Holy One tells Abraham that he will join him? Clearly this proves that Terah must have repented. **[W] You shall be buried at a ripe old age.** He informs him as well that Ishmael would also repent, while Abraham was still living, and that Esau would not yet have gone bad (which is why Abraham died five years before his time). **[X]** In fact, Esau rebelled against the Lord on the very day of Abraham's death. **[Y]**

[W] See Nahmanides' comment to 11:32 for more on this. **[X]** He ought to have lived at least 180 years, like Isaac (see 35:28), rather than just 175. **[Y]** See Rashi's comment to 25:30.

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ The Hebrew of "but I will execute judgment on the nation they shall serve" (v. 14) really says that I will "also" (OJPS) execute judgment—but against whom else has such judgment been threatened that it is "also" against the Egyptians? ✦ How can the Holy One tell Abraham "You shall go to your fathers in peace" (v. 15) when his "fathers" were idolaters? His soul would not be with them, and his body was not buried with them either!

IBN EZRA **14 The nation they shall serve.** To whom they shall be enslaved.

15 You shall go to your fathers. That is, euphemistically, "you shall die" a natural death. **In peace.** Unlike your offspring.

KIMHI **14 But I will execute judgment on the nation they shall serve.** Even though I commanded that the Israelites be enslaved, the nation they shall serve will do more than I commanded, just like Babylonia: "I was only angry a little, but they overdid the punishment" (Zech. 1:15); "I was angry at My people, I defiled My heritage; I put them into your hands, but you showed them no mercy. Even upon the aged you made your yoke exceedingly heavy" (Isa. 47:6). They were only "enslaved and oppressed" at all because they sinned while in Egypt: "Cast away, every one of you, the detestable things that you are drawn to, and do not defile yourselves with the fetishes of Egypt" (Ezek. 20:7). In fact, He sent them prophets before Moses to take them out of Egypt, which is how Moses could say, "Please, O Lord, make someone else Your agent" (Exod. 4:13); see also that passage in Ezekiel 20, which explains all this. So they could not have been enslaved in Egypt just because Abram asked, "How shall I know?" (v. 8)—especially since v. 6 says clearly that "he put his trust in the LORD" (see my comments there). **With great wealth.** In compensation for their work.

15 You shall go to your fathers in peace. "Going to one's fathers" is simply an idiom for dying. Jacob too, in Egypt, "was gathered to his people" (49:33); Moses, in the wilderness, is told, "You shall be gathered to your kin, as your brother Aaron . . . was gathered to his kin" (Deut. 32:50). As for the midrash that says this must mean Terah repented, Josiah too is told, "Assuredly, I will gather you to your fathers" (2 Kings 22:20), yet his father, Amon, died a wicked man. **You shall be buried at a ripe old age.** You will live to see your grandchildren.

NAHMANIDES **14 But I will execute judgment on the nation they shall serve.** Rashi takes "also" (see OJPS) to be including the four kingdoms of Daniel 8. But the straightforward sense is this: Just as I will judge your offspring, so I will also judge their oppressors. As I see it, this means, "I will judge them despite the fact that they are carrying out My will." As in Zech. 1:15 and Isa. 47:6, the Egyptians too overdid the evil, throwing the Israelite boys into the Nile and embittering their lives, intending to wipe out all trace of them. That is what "judging" them means. "I will judge them to determine whether they did what was decreed or more than that." This is what Jethro was referring to when he talked about the Egyptians' "schemes" (Exod. 18:11) against the Israelites. See also "they acted presumptuously toward them" (Neh. 9:10). Now, Maimonides says in the "Book of Knowledge" **[T]** that none of the Egyptians were personally commanded to afflict the Israelites, and each of them individually had the free choice not to do so. But that does not ring true to me. If the Holy One had merely decreed that some nation should afflict them, and the Egyptians had taken advantage of the opportunity, they would have received credit for fulfilling the commandment. When a king issues a command, one who evades it and throws the burden on others "provokes his anger and risks his life" (Prov. 20:2), while one who carries it out "obtains favor" (Prov. 8:35) from him. Note that Abram's offspring are to serve "the nation," not the individuals of that nation, and that they went down to Egypt of their own free will. So the sense is as I have explained (see Exodus Rabbah as well). Clearly throwing baby boys into the Nile is not included in "enslaving and oppressing" them. It would have completely wiped them out. You should know that when a man is inscribed and sealed on Rosh Hashanah to be killed during the upcoming year, the bandit who murders him does not get away scot-free. He is wicked and must die for his crime. But when the decree is announced by a prophet, whoever carries it out is explicitly judged. Someone who hears the decree and carries it out to fulfill the will of God is not a sinner; he is evaluated positively. As the Holy One told Jehu, "Because you have acted well and done what was pleasing to Me, having carried out all that I desired upon the House of Ahab, four generations of your descendants shall occupy the throne of Israel" (2 Kings 10:30). But if someone killed the man out of hatred or for personal advantage, he has transgressed and is punished; see (e.g.) Isaiah 10. **[U]**

15 As for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace. Rashi's comment that Abram would not see any of this is wrong even according to his own interpretation of v. 13. Abraham did indeed see both himself (21:34) and his son Isaac (26:3) as "strangers in a land not theirs" (v. 13). What our verse means is, "Though I will indeed punish your descendants, I will not punish you."

[T] The first of the 14 sections of the *Mishneh Torah*. **[U]** We omit Nahmanides' long discussion of how this principle relates to the Assyrians and the Babylonians.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **15 You shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried at a ripe old age.** You shall lie with your ancestors Adam and Eve, who are buried in the cave of Machpelah in Hebron—but, unlike them, who were expelled from the garden and had one of their sons killed by the other, you shall die in peace (Abarbanel).

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NJPS 16And they shall return here in the fourth generation, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete."

17When the sun set and it was very dark, there appeared a smoking oven, and a

OJPS 16And in the fourth generation they shall come back hither; for the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet full."

17And it came to pass, that, when the sun went down, and there was thick darkness,

16 וְדוֹר רְבִיעִי יָשֻׁובוּ הֵנָּה כִּי לֹא־שָׁלֵם
עֲוֹן הָאֱמֹרִי עַד־הֵנָּה׃
17 וַיְהִי הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ בָּאָה וַעֲלָטָה הָיָה וְהִנֵּה
תַנּוּר עָשָׁן וְלַפִּיד אֵשׁ אֲשֶׁר עָבַר בֵּין

RASHI **16 And they shall return here in the fourth generation.** "After being exiled to Egypt, they will live there for three generations, and the fourth will return to this land." He was, of course, speaking to him in the land of Canaan when making this covenant (see v. 7). And that is exactly what happened. Jacob went down to Egypt. Count the generations, and you find Jacob's son Judah; Judah's son Perez; Perez' son Hezron; and then Caleb son of Hezron, who returned to the land. **For the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.** They could not be expelled from their land before that time. For the Holy One does not punish any nation before its seah is full (as the expression goes): "Assailing them with *fury* unchained" (Isa. 27:8). **[Z]**

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ The promise that "they shall return here in the fourth generation" (v. 16) is quite difficult to understand; even Caleb, one of just two who returned from his generation, was the sixth generation from Abraham, not the fourth. But what else could it mean? ✦ Telling us that "the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete" shows that the Israelites were not sent to Egypt as punishment, and it certainly wasn't for their benefit. Couldn't the Israelites simply have waited where they were, in Canaan? ✦ For that matter, how could it be decreed that the Amorites should lose their land if they had not yet sinned enough to deserve that punishment?

17 When the sun set. For other examples of this unusual Hebrew syntax, see 42:35

[Z] The citation puns on *sase'ah* ("fury") and seah, a unit of measurement.

KIMHI **16 The iniquity of the Amorites.** The same Hebrew word can refer to "iniquity" and to the punishment that results from the iniquity: "My *punishment* is too great to bear!" (4:13). "Sin" can carry the same meaning: "Such shall be the *punishment* of Egypt" (Zech. 14:19). Our verse is saying that the time to punish the Amorites had not yet arrived. **Is not yet complete.** The Holy One is patient with the wicked. There is a fixed time for everything. Sometimes He inflicts punishment immediately and sometimes after a long wait, all in accordance with His wisdom.

17 It was very dark. This intense darkness hinted at the further exiles by which

RASHBAM **16 And they shall return here in the fourth generation.** It is a mistake to explain this as the fourth generation from Jacob. Once the time has been fixed at "four hundred years" (v. 13), what do we care whether that is the fourth generation or the fifth? Either way, it would be 400 years. What is happening here is that the Holy One is explaining *why* He must wait 400 years—the Israelites cannot return until after the fourth generation of Amorites. As we see from M. Eduy. 2:9, a generation is 100 years, and four generations is therefore 400 years. "Even though the inhabitants of the land have sinned, and their sentence is that the land will spew out its inhabitants, I must still wait four generations: 'For I the LORD your God am an impassioned God, visiting the guilt of the parents upon the children, upon the third and upon the fourth generations of those who reject Me' [Exod. 20:5]. Perhaps the children will repent." **For the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.** The time period after which I will exact punishment from the sinning Amorites is not yet complete, and it will not be until after the fourth generation of Amorites from now. — That is the straightforward sense of this verse.

NAHMANIDES **16 And they shall return here in the fourth generation.** Rashi's comment is completely wrong. In my view, "the fourth generation" (correctly understood) refers to the fourth generation of the Amorites, which would complete their iniquity. Remember that He is patient with iniquity until "the fourth generation" (Exod. 20:5). If the Amorites had repented, He would not have destroyed them. They would have become a laboring class or simply cleared out. **The iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.** Since "[the Amorites'] stature was like the cedar's and [they were] stout as the oak" (Amos 2:9), the Israelites would not be able to do anything against the Amorites—the strongest of the Canaanites—until their seah was full, at which time their own iniquities would entrap them. But then Sihon king of the Amorites would be the first whom they would dispossess. **[V]**

17 There appeared a smoking oven, and a flaming torch. What he saw was something that looked like an oven, completely smoking, with a flaming torch burning

[V] See Numbers 21.

IBN EZRA **16 The fourth generation.** Most of the commentators are confused about the meaning of this word *dor*, taking it to mean a fixed length of time. But, as the Sages point out, there were 10 generations from Adam to Noah and 10 more from Noah to Abraham. (See also Job 42:16.) The word *dor* is actually derived from a root meaning "to dwell," as in "I would rather stand at the threshold of God's house than *dwell* in the tents of the wicked" (Ps. 84:11). It refers to the period of time during which a person "dwells" in his earthly life, whether long or short. Here, it is the fourth generation after his offspring become strangers—in Egypt, of course: "You shall not abhor an Egyptian, for you were a *stranger* in his land" (Deut. 23:8). Kohath, Amram, and Moses and Aaron were all "strangers" in Egypt, but their children—the fourth generation—returned to the land of Canaan. **The iniquity of the Amorites.** Rather, their "punishment"; see my comment to 4:13. The Amorites are singled out for special mention because of their might; the great kings whom Moses killed **[O]** were both Amorites, and so were the five kings who joined forces against Joshua. **[P]** There are other proofs of their might as well: "I destroyed the Amorite before them, whose stature was like the cedar's and who was stout as the oak" (Amos 2:9). Those who take the phrase to mean "the iniquity of [Abraham's] 'saying'" (that he wanted a sign, from *amar*, "to say") have said nothing worth hearing.

17 When the sun set. In v. 12 it had not yet set; now it did so. **It was very dark.** For the only other examples of this rare Hebrew

[O] See Numbers 21. **[P]** See Joshua 10.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **16 The fourth generation.** Note the promise to Jehu in 2 Kings 10:30 that a fourth generation of his family would sit on the throne of Israel before the dynasty would be wiped out (Hizkuni). Were it not for the sin of the spies, the Israelites would have returned in the third generation, the generation of Moses and Aaron (Gersonides). **The iniquity of the Amorites.** They are mentioned specifically because Abraham was dwelling at the terebinths of Mamre the Amorite (Hizkuni).

17 There appeared a smoking oven, and a flaming torch which passed between those pieces. Note that Abraham did *not* pass between the pieces; he undertook no obligation as a part of this covenant (Abarbanel).

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NJPS flaming torch which passed between those pieces. [18]On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your offspring I assign this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates: [19]the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, [20]the Hittites, the

הַגְּזָרִים הָאֵלֶּה׃ 18 בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא כָּרַת יְהוָה
אֶת־אַבְרָם בְּרִית לֵאמֹר לְזַרְעֲךָ נָתַתִּי
אֶת־הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת מִנְּהַר מִצְרַיִם עַד־
הַנָּהָר הַגָּדֹל נְהַר־פְּרָת׃ 19 אֶת־הַקֵּינִי
וְאֶת־הַקְּנִזִּי וְאֶת הַקַּדְמֹנִי׃ 20 וְאֶת־הַחִתִּי

OJPS behold a smoking furnace, and a flaming torch that passed between these pieces. [18]In that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying: "Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates; [19]the Kenite, and the Kenizzite, and the Kadmonite, [20]and the Hittite, and

RASHI and 2 Kings 13:21. As for the verb itself, the accent here shows that it means the sun "went down" (see OJPS). For it to mean that the sun was *going* down, the accent would have to be on the other syllable. And that is impossible, since v. 12 has already told us that "the sun was about to set," and what is about to happen in our verse takes place after dark. In hollow verbs, the third feminine singular perfect and the feminine singular participle have the same form, except that when the first syllable is accented, it is the perfect, and when the second syllable is accented, it is the participle. Contrast 29:9, 37:7, and Ruth 1:15 with 29:6 and Esther 2:14. **And it was very dark.** More precisely, "it got dark." **There appeared a smoking oven, and a flaming torch.** Hinting to Abraham that those kingdoms would fall down to Gehenna.

18 On that day. It was the 15th of Nisan. **To your offspring I assign this land.** Literally, "I have given this land" (compare OJPS), because when the Holy One says something, it is as good as done. **The great river.** It is called "great" by virtue of being mentioned in association with the land of Israel. As the saying goes, "The king's servant is a king himself." Stick close to the powerful and people will bow down to you.

19 The Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites. Though 10 nations are listed in vv. 19–21, ultimately only the lands of 7 of them were given to the Israelites. The 3 listed here were the ones that were *not* given; they are Edom, Moab, and Ammon, who will eventually be part of Abraham's inheritance as well: "Edom and Moab shall be subject to them and the children of Ammon shall obey them" (Isa. 11:14).

20 The Rephaim. The land of Og: "all that part of Bashan which is called Rephaim country" (Deut. 3:13).

IBN EZRA word, see Ezekiel, e.g., "Take it out in the *dark*" (Ezek. 12:6). It was a cloudy night. Or perhaps the sense is that this happened after all the light had disappeared from the clouds. **A smoking oven.** The appearance of an oven, with smoke rising from it. **And a flaming torch.** Rather, "a fiery flame" in the oven. **Between those pieces.** Between the halves. This was the taking of the oath, just as in Jer. 34:18. We are told here in the very next verse that "the LORD made a covenant with Abram."

18 From the river of Egypt. The Shihor, not the Nile.

19 The Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites. These are alternate names for some of the Canaanites.

20 The Rephaim. The land of the Ammonites, about which we read, "It, too, is counted as Rephaim country" (Deut. 2:20).

KIMHI Israel would be tempered, over and over again. This is a darkness so intense that, when the sun sets, there is no light whatsoever. Not even the stars can be seen. Again, this hints at the redoubled difficulties of the exiles. **A smoking oven.** Alluding to the anger of the Holy One during this last long exile, with its manifold difficulties. David said the same thing about this exile: "How long will Your anger *smoke* against the prayers of Your people?" (Ps. 80:5). **And a flaming torch.** To pass between the pieces and make the covenant, as a stand-in for God's Presence. The hint was that, no matter how overwhelming the troubles of the exile might be, ultimately a fire from the Lord would destroy the nations among whom the Jews are exiled: "I will pour torrential rain, hailstones, and sulfurous fire upon him and his hordes" (Ezek. 38:22).

19 The Kenites. Named after the city their original ancestor came from (see the Hebrew of Judg. 4:11). They eventually married into the tribe of Judah: "these are the Kenites who came from Hammath, father of the house of Rechab" (1 Chron. 2:55). **[J]** But conceivably these are different Kenites, since Onkelos translates it as "the Shalmaites."

20 The Rephaim. Perhaps these are the Hivites, who would be expected to be mentioned here.

[J] This verse is found in the genealogy of Caleb, who was from the tribe of Judah.

NAHMANIDES inside it, like the "huge smoke and flashing fire" of Ezek. 1:4. **[W]** This smoke is the same as the "dense clouds" (Deut. 5:19) they saw at the giving of the Torah, and the flaming torch is "the fire" of that same verse: "He let you see His great fire; and from amidst that fire you heard His words" (Deut. 4:36); "the Presence of the LORD appeared in the sight of the Israelites as a consuming fire on the top of the mountain" (Exod. 24:17). So it was the Shekhinah that passed between the pieces here, and that was the covenant that He had had with him forever. The Holy One Himself **passed** the covenant **between those pieces.** One who is enlightened will understand.

18 To your offspring I assign this land. The Holy One promised this gift of the land to Abraham many times, each of them for a specific purpose. In 12:7, it did not sound as if anything more was being promised than where Abram had "passed through the land," that is, "as far as the site of Shechem" (12:6). Afterward, when he had earned more merit, he was told, "look out from where you are, to the north and south, to the east and west" (13:14)—the full extent of the land, which He may even have showed him miraculously, as He would later do for Moses. And that promise was not merely geographically larger; it also extended further in time: "forever" (13:15). The third time, here in vv. 18–21, the precise extent of the land is described, and the covenant ensures that the promise is not conditional on not sinning. When he is given the commandment of circumcision, the land becomes "an everlasting holding" (17:8), ensuring that even if they were exiled from the land they would return and reclaim their holding and "I will be their God" (17:8)—His divine Presence itself would lead them. They would not be under the supervision of any star or constellation or angelic prince, as will be further clarified elsewhere in the Torah. **[X]** In the first two promises, the verb is literally "I will give" (since for the second one, the gift had not yet been fully given); but "I assign" of our verse is literally "I have given" (compare OJPS). The literal "I will give" of 17:8 (again, see OJPS) refers to the "everlasting" future, when the land will be given to them again. Rashi's comment about this is not really necessary here.

[W] Nahmanides does not cite the verse but puns on it. Ezek. 1:4 says "cloud," not "smoke"—a difference of one Hebrew letter. **[X]** See Deut. 4:19–20.

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NJPS Perizzites, the Rephaim, [21]the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, and the Jebusites."

16 Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. She had an Egyptian maidservant whose name was Hagar. [2]And Sarai said to Abram, "Look, the LORD has kept me from bearing. Consort with my maid; perhaps I shall have a son through her." And Abram heeded Sarai's request. [3]So Sarai, Abram's wife, took her maid, Hagar the Egyptian—after Abram had dwelt in

OJPS the Perizzite, and the Rephaim, [21]and the Amorite, and the Canaanite, and the Girgashite, and the Jebusite."

16 Now Sarai Abram's wife bore him no children; and she had a handmaid, an Egyptian, whose name was Hagar. [2]And Sarai said unto Abram: "Behold now, the LORD hath restrained me from bearing; go in, I pray thee, unto my handmaid; it may be that I shall be builded up through her." And Abram hearkened to the voice of Sarai. [3]And Sarai Abram's wife took Hagar the Egyptian, her handmaid, after Abram

וְאֶת־הַפְּרִזִּי וְאֶת־הָרְפָאִים׃ [21] וְאֶת־
הָאֱמֹרִי וְאֶת־הַכְּנַעֲנִי וְאֶת־הַגִּרְגָּשִׁי וְאֶת־
הַיְבוּסִי׃ ס

טז

וְשָׂרַי אֵשֶׁת אַבְרָם לֹא יָלְדָה לוֹ
וְלָהּ שִׁפְחָה מִצְרִית וּשְׁמָהּ הָגָר׃ [2] וַתֹּאמֶר
שָׂרַי אֶל־אַבְרָם הִנֵּה־נָא עֲצָרַנִי יְהוָה
מִלֶּדֶת בֹּא־נָא אֶל־שִׁפְחָתִי אוּלַי אִבָּנֶה
מִמֶּנָּה וַיִּשְׁמַע אַבְרָם לְקוֹל שָׂרָי׃ [3] וַתִּקַּח
שָׂרַי אֵשֶׁת־אַבְרָם אֶת־הָגָר הַמִּצְרִית
שִׁפְחָתָהּ מִקֵּץ עֶשֶׂר שָׁנִים לְשֶׁבֶת אַבְרָם

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why did Sarah say, "Look, the LORD has kept me from bearing" (v. 2)? How did she know she was not just naturally infertile? ✦ Why did Sarah say "now" (OJPS)? ✦ In what way could Sarah "have a son" through Hagar's bearing a child? ✦ Why are we suddenly told that this happened "after Abram had dwelt in the land of Canaan ten years" (v. 3)?

RASHI 16:1 An Egyptian maidservant. It was Pharaoh's daughter. When he saw the miracles that were wrought for Sarah, **[A]** he said, "Better that my daughter be a slave in this household than a mistress in another."

2 Perhaps I shall have a son through her. Literally, "perhaps I shall be builded up" (OJPS). This teaches that one who has no children is not built, but destroyed. But Sarah thought, "I *shall* be builded up," as a reward for bringing a competitor into my house." **Abram heeded Sarai's request.** Literally, he "hearkened to the voice of Sarai" (OJPS)—to the "voice" of the Holy Spirit that was within her.

3 So Sarai, Abram's wife, took her maid. She "took" her with words: "How lucky you are, to have a relationship with a person as innocent and holy as this one." **After**

[A] See 12:17.

IBN EZRA 21 The Canaanites. Do not be surprised to see them listed as if they were just one of the nations. All of the seven nations were Canaanites. Canaan had 11 sons. Some texts list 6 of them and encompass the rest by simply calling them Canaanites; our passage has 10 names, listing "Canaanites" as one of them. Elsewhere, "Canaanites" refers to all 11. Compare "Judah and Israel were as numerous as the sands of the sea" (1 Kings 4:20), where Judah and Israel are named separately even though Judah is a part of Israel.

16:2 Perhaps I shall have a son. This is indeed a denominative verb from the word "son," but it is also possible that *ben* ("son") is related to *banah* ("to build") by dropping the ה, as if to say "I shall be built up" (compare OJPS). The father would be the "foundation" of such a building. **And Abram heeded Sarai's request.** He "hearkened" to it (OJPS) and said yes.

3 After Abram had dwelt in the land of Canaan ten years. Our tradition says that a man should not stay with his wife for

KIMHI 21 The Canaanites. Including the Philistines: "From the Shihor, which is close to Egypt, to the territory of Ekron on the north, are accounted Canaanite, namely, those of the five lords of the Philistines" (Josh. 13:3).

16:1 Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. She thought, "God promised to give Abraham offspring who would inherit the land—and he is not going to get them from me; I am too old. Better that his offspring come from my maidservant than from some other woman." **She had an Egyptian maidservant.** Had she been a Canaanite, Sarah would not have accepted her. **Whose name was Hagar.** Her name is mentioned out of respect for Abraham.

2 Perhaps I shall have a son through her. If you have a son with my maidservant, I will consider him my own. **And Abram heeded Sarai's request.** It seemed to him too that his offspring would have to come from Hagar, and he did not wait for God's word about it. As long as it was all right with Sarah, it was all right with him. Either Abraham did not pray for Sarah as Isaac did for Rebekah, **[K]** or his prayer was not answered because God wanted to demonstrate His love for Abraham by miraculously having Sarah give birth at 90.

[K] See 25:21.

NAHMANIDES 16:2 Abram heeded Sarai's request. Literally, he "hearkened to the voice of Sarai" (OJPS). It does not say, "He did so." As much as Abram wanted children, he would not do anything to have them without Sarai's consent, and even now it was not really his own purpose to have a son with Hagar. He wanted to do Sarah's will, so that she could find fulfillment through her maidservant's children. Or perhaps (as Genesis Rabbah suggests) he thought Sarah herself might earn the merit of having her own children by this generous act.

3 Sarai, Abram's wife, took her maid. We see that Abram was in no hurry to do this; it was Sarai who took the initiative. Yet she remained "Abram's wife," not despairing of him or distancing herself from him. She remained his wife and he remained her husband, but

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS 16:1 Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. As you know, excess fat can sometimes interfere with fertility. The stress of having a rival might eventually cause her to lose weight and be able to become pregnant. This might explain what happened to Rachel as well. That is my opinion, anyway. If you object that in 18:12 Sarah calls herself "withered," remember that that was 15 years later (Gersonides). She was not upset for her own sake, but for having not borne children to Abraham, so that the holy seed should remain on earth (Abarbanel).

2 Look, the LORD has kept me from bearing. She knew that all the promises of offspring had been given to him; none involved her (Abarbanel). **Perhaps I shall have a son through her.** Perhaps jealousy will turn my own body fertile (Sforno). **Abram heeded Sarai's request.** Rather, he "listened to her voice" (compare OJPS). It is not that he "heeded" her words but that he gave in to her arguments (Abarbanel).

3 Sarai, Abram's wife. Did she need to be identified for us? The text is saying that she was confident of remaining his wife even after giving her maid to him (Abarbanel).

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NJPS the land of Canaan ten years—and gave her to her husband Abram as concubine. 4He cohabited with Hagar and she conceived; and when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress was lowered in her esteem. 5And Sarai said to Abram, "The wrong done me is your fault! I myself put my maid in your bosom; now that she sees that she is pregnant, I am lowered in her esteem. The LORD decide between you and me!" 6Abram said to Sarai, "Your maid is in your hands. Deal with her as you think right." Then Sarai treated her harshly, and she ran away from her.

7An angel of the LORD found her by a

בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנַעַן וַתִּתֵּן אֹתָהּ לְאַבְרָם אִישָׁהּ
לוֹ לְאִשָּׁה׃ 4 וַיָּבֹא אֶל־הָגָר וַתַּהַר וַתֵּרֶא
כִּי הָרָתָה וַתֵּקַל גְּבִרְתָּהּ בְּעֵינֶיהָ׃
5 וַתֹּאמֶר שָׂרַי אֶל־אַבְרָם חֲמָסִי עָלֶיךָ
אָנֹכִי נָתַתִּי שִׁפְחָתִי בְּחֵיקֶךָ וַתֵּרֶא כִּי
הָרָתָה וָאֵקַל בְּעֵינֶיהָ יִשְׁפֹּט יְהוָה בֵּינִי
וּבֵינֶיךָ*׃ 6 וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָם אֶל־שָׂרַי הִנֵּה
שִׁפְחָתֵךְ בְּיָדֵךְ עֲשִׂי־לָהּ הַטּוֹב בְּעֵינָיִךְ
וַתְּעַנֶּהָ שָׂרַי וַתִּבְרַח מִפָּנֶיהָ׃
7 וַיִּמְצָאָהּ מַלְאַךְ יְהוָה עַל־עֵין הַמַּיִם

נקוד על י׳ בתראה *v. 5.*

OJPS had dwelt ten years in the land of Canaan, and gave her to Abram her husband to be his wife. 4And he went in unto Hagar, and she conceived; and when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress was despised in her eyes. 5And Sarai said unto Abram: "My wrong be upon thee: I gave my handmaid into thy bosom; and when she saw that she had conceived, I was despised in her eyes: the LORD judge between me and thee." 6But Abram said unto Sarai: "Behold, thy maid is in thy hand; do to her that which is good in thine eyes." And Sarai dealt harshly with her, and she fled from her face.

7And the angel of the LORD found her

RASHI **Abram had dwelt in the land of Canaan ten years.** This is technically the amount of time after which, if a woman has not borne a child to her husband, he is obligated to marry another. But the time they spent outside the land of Canaan did not count, because Abraham was not told, "I will make of you a great nation" (12:2) until after he was told to go to the land of Israel.

4 He cohabited with Hagar and she conceived. The very first time. **Her mistress was lowered in her esteem.** She thought, "This Sarai—she's not the same in secret as she pretends to be in public. She makes herself out to be so righteous, but she obviously isn't. She couldn't get pregnant all these years, and I conceived the very first time he slept with me."

5 The wrong done me is your fault! Each of the translations gets part of this phrase correct. She is saying, "I cast the punishment due for the wrong done to me onto you. It was you who prayed to the Holy One, 'O Lord GOD, what can You give me, seeing that I shall die childless?' [15:2]. You prayed only for yourself! You should have prayed for both of us, and then I would have been remembered along with you. And you do further violence to me when you listen to Hagar disparaging me and say nothing!" **Between you and me.** "Between you" is spelled with a second י nowhere in the Bible but here, meaning it can also be read as feminine—"between you, Hagar, and me!" Sarah put the evil eye on Hagar and made her miscarry. Note that the angel announces to her in v. 11 that she is going to conceive—yet she had already conceived in v. 4. But she miscarried that pregnancy.

6 Sarai treated her harshly. **[B]**

[B] The translations follow Rashi's comment.

IBN EZRA more than 10 years if she does not give birth. This verse serves well as a reminder of that practice.

7 Found her. Note the unusual grammatical form; compare the standard form in "taken an aversion" (Deut. 22:16).

KIMHI **4 When she saw that she had conceived, her mistress was lowered in her esteem.** Since Abraham would have offspring through her, she assumed that she would now be the mistress and she began to ignore Sarah's instructions.

5 The wrong done me is your fault! I only did this for you, and now I am being scorned and you don't care and you don't discipline her. I don't want to discipline her myself because it would not be respectful toward you. **The LORD decide between you and me!** In fact, Abraham was unaware of what was going on. Had he known, he would certainly not have permitted Sarah to be treated this way, least of all by her own maidservant—even though he had married her.

6 Your maid is in your hands. Even though she has lain in my arms, she is still your maid as she originally was, and still in your hands to punish her if she does not act properly. You need not worry about whether it is respectful to me. **Then Sarai treated her harshly.** She made her workload overly harsh and perhaps even struck her and cursed her—and Hagar could not stand it and ran away. Sarah acted improperly in this. Despite what Abraham said, she should not have treated her harshly. A decent person does not act this way even if it is technically permitted. We know that what Sarah did was wrong in the eyes of God, for the angel told Hagar, "The LORD has paid heed to your suffering" (v. 11). But Abraham did not stop her even though he thought it was wrong. He was trying to keep the peace between them. But the story is written in the Torah for people to learn to emulate good behavior and avoid bad behavior.

7 The spring on the road to Shur. She was on her way home to Egypt.

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ How could Sarah say, "The wrong done me is your fault!" (v. 5)? She gave Hagar to Abraham, and he was certainly not responsible for how Hagar felt about her.

NAHMANIDES she wanted Hagar to be his wife as well. **After Abram had dwelt in the land of Canaan ten years.** See Rashi's comment, which is misleading; he makes it sound as if excluding the time spent outside the land from the 10-year period should not technically apply to anyone but Abram. But the Mishnah makes clear that it applies to everyone. Other commentators have made a different mistake here, saying that a man whose wife is childless for 10 years need not divorce her or marry another. But that too is not so. What *is* true is that, if a man's wife is childless for 5 or even 10 years outside the land, when they come to the land they are still given 10 full years from the time of their arrival. It might be that the merit of dwelling in the land will give them a child. Indeed, this is what Abraham and our Matriarch Sarah did. **As concubine.** Rather, "to be his wife" (OJPS). Sarai did *not* intend Hagar to be his concubine, but his wife, married to him (see my first comment to this verse). This was out of Sarah's own self-discipline, as well as the respect with which she treated her husband.

6 Then Sarai treated her harshly, and she ran away from her. Our Matriarch sinned in treating her this way, as did Abraham in permitting her to do so. The Holy One responded by giving her a "wild ass" of a son (v. 12), treating the descendants of Abraham and Sarah harshly in every possible way.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **5 Between you.** Note the dot over the second י of the Hebrew word (Masorah).

7 An angel of the LORD found her by a spring of water in the wilderness. He appeared to her like an ordinary person; she was

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NJPS spring of water in the wilderness, the spring on the road to Shur, [8]and said, "Hagar, slave of Sarai, where have you come from, and where are you going?" And she said, "I am running away from my mistress Sarai."

[9]And the angel of the LORD said to her, "Go back to your mistress, and submit to her harsh treatment." [10]And the angel of the LORD said to her,

"I will greatly increase your offspring,
And they shall be too many to count."

[11]The angel of the LORD said to her further,

"Behold, you are with child
And shall bear a son;
You shall call him Ishmael,
For the LORD has paid heed to your suffering.

OJPS by a fountain of water in the wilderness, by the fountain in the way to Shur. [8]And he said: "Hagar, Sarai's handmaid, whence camest thou? and whither goest thou?" And she said: "I flee from the face of my mistress Sarai."

[9]And the angel of the LORD said unto her: "Return to thy mistress, and submit thyself under her hands." [10]And the angel of the LORD said unto her:

"I will greatly multiply thy seed, that it shall not be numbered for multitude."

[11]And the angel of the LORD said unto her:

"Behold, thou art with child,
and shalt bear a son;
and thou shalt call his name Ishmael,
because the LORD hath heard thy affliction.

בַּמִּדְבָּר עַל־הָעַיִן בְּדֶרֶךְ שׁוּר׃ 8 וַיֹּאמַר
הָגָר שִׁפְחַת שָׂרַי אֵי־מִזֶּה בָאת וְאָנָה
תֵלֵכִי וַתֹּאמֶר מִפְּנֵי שָׂרַי גְּבִרְתִּי אָנֹכִי
בֹרַחַת׃
9 וַיֹּאמֶר לָהּ מַלְאַךְ יְהוָה שׁוּבִי אֶל־גְּבִרְתֵּךְ
וְהִתְעַנִּי תַּחַת יָדֶיהָ׃ 10 וַיֹּאמֶר לָהּ מַלְאַךְ
יְהוָה
הַרְבָּה אַרְבֶּה אֶת־זַרְעֵךְ
וְלֹא יִסָּפֵר מֵרֹב׃
11 וַיֹּאמֶר לָהּ מַלְאַךְ יְהוָה
הִנָּךְ הָרָה
וְיֹלַדְתְּ בֵּן
וְקָרָאת שְׁמוֹ יִשְׁמָעֵאל
כִּי־שָׁמַע יְהוָה אֶל־עָנְיֵךְ׃

RASHI **8 Where have you come from?** He knew, of course, but he wanted to start a conversation with her. The Hebrew idiom here is interesting: "Where from this?" It is a shorthand way of saying, "Where is the place of which you would say, 'I am coming from this'?"

9 The angel of the LORD said to her. A different angel was sent to her for each of these messages, which is why the same phrase begins vv. 9, 10, and 11.

11 Behold, you are with child. The same Hebrew words, when they are said to Manoah's wife in Judg. 13:7, are translated, "You are going to conceive," and that is what they mean here, too: "When you return, you will conceive." **And shall bear a son.** Rather, "and are going to bear a son." For the unusual form of the participle, compare "You who *dwell* in Lebanon" (Jer. 22:23). **You shall call him Ishmael.** This future tense phrase is the equivalent of an imperative: "Call him Ishmael!" The same is

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ How could Hagar reach the level of prophecy we see in v. 8 when the angel speaks to her? ✦ Why does the angel ask, "Where have you come from, and where are you going?" as if he does not know? ✦ Why must we be told that "the angel of the LORD said to her" over and over again, in vv. 9, 10, and 11? ✦ Why does the angel first tell her, "I will greatly increase your offspring" (v. 10), and only then that she is "with child" (v. 11)? ✦ Why does the angel tell her to name Ishmael because "the LORD has paid heed to your suffering," when she was given Ishmael for Abraham's sake, not her own? She did not "suffer" until v. 6, *after* she was pregnant. And let's not forget that it was Abraham, not Hagar, who ended up calling him Ishmael (see v. 15).

IBN EZRA **8 Where have you come from.** The Hebrew idiom is "from which?"—implying "from which place?" **Running away.** Note the vowel substitution due to the guttural ח of this root.

11 Ishmael. The א is completely silent in this name, for ease of pronunciation.

KIMHI **8 And said.** Note that the verb takes its pausal form here; even a *revi'a* **[L]** sometimes acts as a strong enough pause to effect this. **Hagar, slave of Sarai.** The implication of calling her Sarai's maidservant after stating her name is as much as to ask, "What are you doing here?"

9 And the angel of the LORD said to her. The same phrase begins vv. 9, 10, and 11, a common phenomenon in the Bible; here it serves to emphasize each speech (see the grammar section of my *Sefer Mikhlol*). In this case it may also be because each utterance deals with a separate subject. The Sages' response to the midrash that three separate angels spoke with her was this: "Even the maidservants of the Patriarchs had angels appear to them three or four times. But they have never appeared to us even once!" **Submit to her harsh treatment.** You will be better off staying with Abraham; due to his merit, your offspring will greatly increase.

10 I will greatly increase your offspring. The angel is God's avatar and speaks in His name. **They shall be too many to count.** This is an exaggeration.

11 Behold, you are with child. She knew this, of course (see v. 4); it was a conversation starter. **And shall bear a son.** This information was new. The unusual combination of participle and converted perfect serves to inform her: "Know that you shall bear a son

[L] The masoretic punctuation mark on this word.

NAHMANIDES **9 Go back to your mistress, and submit to her harsh treatment.** He was hinting that she would never go free of her—the descendants of Sarah would rule over Hagar's offspring forever.

11 You shall call him Ishmael. As in "a son shall be born to the House of David, Josiah by name" (1 Kings 13:2), this is simply telling her what the child's name would be. She would call him by this name and remember thereby that God had paid heed (*shama el*) to

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS not immediately aware of his divine status (Abarbanel). As the end of v. 11 demonstrates, he "found her" praying—not by a spring but by a crossroads, as the word sometimes means (Sforno). **Shur.** This was "the wilderness of Shur" (Exod. 15:22) into which the Israelites traveled after crossing the sea (Hizkuni).

9 Go back to your mistress, and submit to her harsh treatment. For Sarah's treatment of her was for her own good, not to take revenge on her (Gersonides).

10 I will greatly increase your offspring. Compare 22:17; but the precise combination "greatly increase" (without "and") occurs only in "I will *make most severe* Your pangs in childbearing" of 3:16 (Masorah). Have no fear that Sarai's harsh treatment will make you miscarry (Bekhor Shor).

11 The angel of the LORD said to her further. He spoke four times, in vv. 8, 9, 10, and 11, realizing after each of the first three times that he had not gotten through to her (Abarbanel).

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NJPS [12]He shall be a wild ass of a man;
His hand against everyone,
And everyone's hand against him;
He shall dwell alongside of all his kinsmen."
[13]And she called the LORD who spoke to her, "You Are El-roi," by which she meant, "Have I not gone on seeing after

OJPS [12]And he shall be a wild ass of a man:
his hand shall be against every man,
and every man's hand against him;
and he shall dwell in the face of all his brethren."
[13]And she called the name of the LORD that spoke unto her, Thou art a God of seeing; for she said: "Have I even here seen

12 וְהוּא יִהְיֶה פֶּרֶא אָדָם
יָדוֹ בַכֹּל
וְיַד כֹּל בּוֹ
וְעַל־פְּנֵי כָל־אֶחָיו יִשְׁכֹּן׃
13 וַתִּקְרָא שֵׁם־יְהוָה הַדֹּבֵר אֵלֶיהָ אַתָּה
אֵל רָאִי כִּי אָמְרָה הֲגַם הֲלֹם רָאִיתִי אַחֲרֵי

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Hagar's saying "Have I not seen" (as she literally does in v. 13) is very strange. One would think "El-roi" would mean "the God who saw me," so why would she say that *she* saw? But if it does mean "the God whom I saw," why would she add "after He saw me"?

RASHI true for "you shall name him Isaac" (17:19), using the masculine form instead of the feminine.

12 A wild ass of a man. Loving hunting and the outdoors: "he dwelt in the wilderness and became a bowman" (21:20). **His hand against everyone.** He will be a bandit. **And everyone's hand against him.** Everyone will hate him and be on the attack against him. **He shall dwell alongside of all his kinsmen.** For he will have a great number of offspring.

13 You Are El-roi. The vowel of *roi* makes clear that this is a noun, not a verb: "You are the God of seeing, who sees the affront done to the offended." **Have I not gone on seeing?** She is indeed asking this in

RASHBAM **16:12 He shall be a wild ass of a man.** An idiom for one who is a stranger, not knowing anyone or even knowing the language. This is the fate of traders, and the Ishmaelites are more involved in trade than anyone else (see 37:25). **His hand against everyone, and everyone's hand against him.** Rather, "his hand shall be [involved] in everyone, and everyone's hand in him." This is the way of merchants, who do business with everyone. Since the passage is one of blessing, this verse must also be interpreted that way. Obviously the angel did not come to curse him. **He shall dwell alongside of all his kinsmen.** Rather, "in front of" them. He will do business with all of them and end up richer than any of them.

KIMHI just as surely as you know that you are with child." But some think the verb is acting here as if it were some kind of quadriliteral. **The LORD has paid heed to your suffering.** To your crying out at your suffering. — We are forced to understand it this way because the Hebrew literally says that the Lord has "heard" it (OJPS), not "seen" it. But we might understand it as Onkelos did, "the Lord has heard your prayer," using a different, quite common meaning of the root ענה, referring to speech.

12 He shall be. He and his offspring. **A wild ass of a man.** That is, a man of the desert. For most Ishmaelites live in tents in the desert: "like an Arabian in the wilderness" (Jer. 3:2). The Arabs are Ishmaelites. **His hand against everyone, and everyone's hand against him.** This is the nature of desert dwellers. **He shall dwell alongside of all his kinsmen.** That is, his neighbors. Though everyone's hand is against him, he will not flee, but will dwell alongside them.

13 And she called the LORD who spoke to her, "You Are El-roi." She called him this after he departed. Originally she thought he was a human being, since she did not think a human being could see an angel—like Manoah, who told his wife, "We shall surely die, for we have seen a divine being" (Judg. 13:22). But when she saw that he vanished instantly, she realized it was an angel and said, "You Are El-roi," that is, an angel whom a

IBN EZRA **12 A wild ass of a man.** Acting among them with complete freedom: "Who sets the wild ass free?" (Job 39:5). No one from outside his family will govern him. But some would translate as "a wild ass *and* a man," as in "Sun [and] moon stand still on high" (Hab. 3:11). **His hand against everyone, and everyone's hand against him.** Following the latter translation, because he will be a wild ass his hand will be against everyone; because he is a man, everyone's hand will be against him. But I take it to mean that he, like a wild ass, will be against everyone and will defeat them by his strength, after which, as a result, everyone's hand will be against him. Dan. 7:7 says so explicitly (for Ishmael is the "fourth beast" there). **Alongside of all his kinsmen.** Rather, his "brothers" (see OJPS), the sons of Keturah; "they camped alongside all their brothers" (25:18). Note that the Midianites were descendants of Keturah, **[Q]** and that the Midianites are called Ishmaelites both in the Torah and in the book of Judges. **[R]**

13 El-roi. That is, "God of seeing" (OJPS), a God seen in visions; for a noun comparable in form to *roi*, see "affliction" of Lam. 3:1. **Have I not gone on.** Rather,

NAHMANIDES her suffering. In fact, Abraham himself would give the boy this name, as a prayer that God would heed and answer *him*, or perhaps (as Rashi suggests in his comment to v. 15) the Holy Spirit rested on him, meaning that he gave the boy this name because God had paid heed to Hagar's suffering, as the angel says here. But I think the angel is indeed instructing Hagar to give him this name. She, being a concubine, was afraid to give her master's son a name, but revealed to Abram what had happened, and he fulfilled the word of the Lord. The text did not have to go to the trouble of telling us this.

12 A wild ass of a man. See Rashi's comment. In fact, these words are in construct, as the translations take them. He will be a wild man who knows the wilderness, going forth at dawn to prey on everyone, as everyone would prey on him. This refers to the offspring he would raise, who would battle with all the other nations. As for Ibn Ezra's comments, note that dwelling **alongside of all his kinsmen** implies that his offspring would be more numerous than theirs.

13 Have I not gone on seeing after He saw me! **[Y]**

[Y] See Nahmanides' discussion of Abraham's questions in 17:17.

[Q] See 25:2. **[R]** Ibn Ezra seems to be referring to 37:25–28 and Judg. 8:22–24.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **12 A wild ass of a man.** The Ishmaelites are merchants and desert travelers, like the "wild ass used to the desert" of Jer. 2:24 (Bekhor Shor). The most capable of causing harm to others (Gersonides). The angel was saying, "You must go home. If the baby is born here, he will be a wild ass of a man" (Abarbanel). A wild ass on his Egyptian mother's side, a man on his father's side—as indeed happened, since the Sages tell us Ishmael repented (Sforno). **His hand against everyone, and everyone's hand against him.** Go back home so he can grow up in society and dwell with his brothers the sons of Keturah; do not let him be born here and grow up like a desert animal (Abarbanel).

13 The LORD who spoke to her. By means of a prophet (Gersonides). This was no prophet; he spoke in the voice of God, as angels do (Abarbanel). **El-roi.** The "God of seeing," who sees all and knows all (Gersonides). The God who "sees me," that is, understands me

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NJPS He saw me!" [14]Therefore the well was called Beer-lahai-roi; it is between Kadesh and Bered.—[15]Hagar bore a son to Abram, and Abram gave the son that Hagar bore him the name Ishmael. [16]Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to Abram.

OJPS Him that seeth Me?" [14]Wherefore the well was called "Beer-lahai-roi; behold, it is between Kadesh and Bered. [15]And Hagar bore Abram a son; and Abram called the name of his son, whom Hagar bore, Ishmael. [16]And Abram was fourscore and six years old, when Hagar bore Ishmael to Abram.

17 When Abram was ninety-nine years

RASHI amazement, as OJPS understands it: "I hardly expected to see the messengers of the Omnipresent here in the wilderness after seeing them in the house of Abraham—where I saw them all the time!" You can tell that she did see them there regularly, for Manoah saw the angel just once and said, "We shall surely die, for we have seen a divine being" (Judg. 13:22). But Hagar saw angels four times, one after another, and never so much as trembled.

14 Beer-lahai-roi. As Onkelos translates it: "The well where the living angel appeared."

15 Abram gave the son that Hagar bore him the name Ishmael. Even though Abram did not hear the angel tell Hagar (in v. 11) to call the boy by this name, the Holy Spirit rested on him and caused him to do so.

16 Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to Abram. This is said in praise of Ishmael; it informs us that he was 13 when he was circumcised and did not hesitate.

17:1 I am El Shaddai. I am the one *she-dai*, who has enough in My divinity for each of My creatures. So "walk in My ways" and I will be your divine patron. This is the

רֹאָי׃ [14] עַל־כֵּן קָרָא לַבְּאֵר בְּאֵר לַחַי רֹאִי הִנֵּה בֵּין־קָדֵשׁ וּבֵין בָּרֶד׃ [15] וַתֵּלֶד הָגָר לְאַבְרָם בֵּן וַיִּקְרָא אַבְרָם שֵׁם־בְּנוֹ אֲשֶׁר־יָלְדָה הָגָר יִשְׁמָעֵאל׃ [16] וְאַבְרָם בֶּן־שְׁמֹנִים שָׁנָה וְשֵׁשׁ שָׁנִים בְּלֶדֶת־הָגָר אֶת־יִשְׁמָעֵאל לְאַבְרָם׃ ס

יז

וַיְהִי אַבְרָם בֶּן־תִּשְׁעִים שָׁנָה וְתֵשַׁע

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why are we told that Abraham "was ninety-nine years old" (v. 1) when this prophecy came to him? We are not given his age for any other prophecy. ✦ What is the point of this vision? Hasn't the Holy One already promised him land and offspring? He made a covenant with him about all these things already in ch. 15.

17 And when Abram was ninety years

IBN EZRA "even here" (OJPS). The word is sometimes taken as "now," but it literally means not "at this *time*" but "at this *place*": "Has anyone else come *here*?" (1 Sam. 10:22). She is saying, "Have I seen an angel of the Lord here now that the Lord has seen my affliction?—For He sees me always." **[S]**

14 Beer-lahai-roi. The *lahai* part of this name means "for the one who will be alive [*ḥai*] a year from now"; compare "To life!" (1 Sam. 25:6). The Ishmaelites would hold a pilgrimage festival at that well every year. To this day it is called the well of Zamzam.

17:1 El Shaddai. "Shaddai" is not a name but rather an adjective: "God Almighty" (OJPS); compare "the voice of the Almighty" (Ezek. 1:24) and "the Almighty will be your treasure" (Job 22:25). For a word of this same pattern, see "my heart is *sick*" (Lam. 1:22). Many would explain the term as coming from a root meaning "to

[S] Ibn Ezra's precise point is not clear.

KIMHI human being can actually see. **By which she meant.** Literally, "for she said" (OJPS), meaning, "she thought." **Have I not gone on seeing after He saw me!** Rather, she thought: When a human being departs, he is still visible as far as the eye can see. But when this one left, I could not see him "even here" (OJPS) in my place. So it must have been an angel who saw me.

14 Therefore the well was called. Literally, "therefore [someone unidentified] called the well" where the angel appeared to Hagar by this name. **Beer-lahai-roi.** "The well of the living one who saw me"—"living" because angels live forever. The "well" is the "spring" of v. 7. **It is between Kadesh and Bered.** We are told its location so that one who sees it can offer praise to the Omnipresent for choosing the righteous. The angel only appeared to Hagar because of her relationship with Abraham (even though she was not here on assignment from him). Bered is Shur of v. 7. Since the place had two names, both names are mentioned. Note that Onkelos identifies both of them as Hagra.

15 Abram gave the son that Hagar bore him the name Ishmael. Even though the angel told Hagar to give the boy that name, she told Abraham. So really they both gave him that name, just as Seth was named by both Adam and Eve. **[M]** We also find cases where the father gives him one name and the mother a different name, as when Rachel named her little boy "Ben-oni; but his father called him Benjamin" (35:18).

16 Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to Abram. We learn that Hagar did not put off getting pregnant but gave birth the same year that Sarai gave her to Abram. She wanted to give Abram the joy of this son.

17:1 When Abram was ninety-nine years old. The Holy One waited another 13 years before commanding Abram about circumcision; the miracle would be even greater if he had a son at the age of 100. It shows also Abram's love of God, doing whatever He commanded even when He commanded him to be circumcised when he was 99 and feeble. He commanded him to be circumcised so that Isaac could be born of more proper seed and in a more miraculous way. For circumcision weakens the member. Between that and Abram's age, it would be one miracle on top of another. **I am El Shaddai.** That is, "Almighty" (OJPS) and victorious. Even though your

[M] See 5:3 and 4:25.

NAHMANIDES **17:1 El Shaddai.** These are two separate names, each with its own meaning. "El" refers to power, as in "the *mighty men* of Moab" (Exod. 15:15). As for Shaddai, see Rashi's comment, which is amplified by Maimonides, who says in the *Guide* that He has no need for the existence of what He has brought into existence or of any other existence than His own; His own existence is

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS (Abarbanel). **Have I not gone on seeing after He saw me!** Rather, "Have I too not seen?" Now I have seen not just in Abraham's house but on my own. Hagar too is worthy of this! — Compare the expression "Is Saul too among the prophets?" e.g., 1 Sam. 10:11 (Bekhor Shor). She was surprised to find a prophet there; it meant that the prophet must have been stationed there specifically to speak to her. Moreover, she had no idea there was any prophet in the world other than Abram (Gersonides).

15 Abram gave the son that Hagar bore him the name Ishmael. Who deserved the name from both parents; see v. 11 and also 17:20 (Sforno).

17:1 The LORD appeared to Abram. A vision is always a lower level than a prophecy, which explains Exod. 6:3 (Sforno). **Walk in My ways.** By keeping the commandment I am about to give you (Bekhor Shor). Keep My commandments (Gersonides). **And be**

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NJPS old, the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am El Shaddai. Walk in My ways and be

OJPS old and nine, the LORD appeared to Abram, and said unto him: "I am God Almighty; walk

שְׁנָתִים וַיֵּרָא יְהוָה אֶל־אַבְרָם וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו
אֲנִי־אֵל שַׁדַּי הִתְהַלֵּךְ לְפָנַי וֶהְיֵה תָמִים׃

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why does the Holy One suddenly announce, for the first time, "I am El Shaddai"? ✦ What does that expression even mean? ✦ Why does the Holy One say "Walk in My ways and be blameless," as if Abraham were not already doing so?

RASHI meaning of that name everywhere in the Bible it appears: He "has enough." It must be understood appropriate to the context in each place. **Walk in My ways.** As Onkelos translates it: "Worship Me." **And be blameless.** A further command: be blameless in all the tests I put you through. But a midrash interprets the two phrases together: Walk in My ways by means of circumcision, which will make you "perfect" (as the Hebrew word can also be translated). For as long as you have a foreskin, I consider you blemished. Another possible translation is "be whole." — You lack control over five of your organs: two eyes, two ears, and your penis. Now I will give you an extra ה

IBN EZRA destroy," implying victory and power. The name is used in this chapter to frighten Abram into circumcising himself. The Tetragrammaton stands for the opposite of this name, which is an adjective that refers to actions. **[T]** For the world depends on both these names. One who understands the secret of the Tetragrammaton will certainly believe that. **Be blameless.** Rather, "be wholehearted" (OJPS) and do not ask "why?" about circumcision.

[T] The Tetragrammaton, by contrast, is a proper noun derived from the verb "to be."

KIMHI wife is old and barren, and you are old and feeble and have still further weakened your seed, I can overcome all this—I am God Almighty. Nature stems from Me, and I can change it as I please. — As He told Moses, "I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as El Shaddai" (Exod. 6:3). For all three of them had barren wives who ultimately gave birth by God's will. He heard the prayers of these righteous men, changed nature for their wives, and they gave birth. **Walk in My ways.** That is, as Onkelos translates, "serve Me" as I command you. The same idiom appears, with the same meaning, in 24:40 and 48:15, as well as with Hezekiah in 2 Kings 20:3, who speaks first about the service of the heart and then adds that he has also "*done* what is pleasing to You." God tells Abram here that his service of the heart and his behavior were as complete as rational thought could make them, but that He is requiring an additional act of service with his body. Abram's intellect could not have told him to do this, but God wanted it as a sign that Abraham's descendants would be a special people with a special mark. The other nations, not having been commanded about this, might not do it, but it would apply to Abraham's special offspring, Isaac, and to his special offspring, the descendants of Jacob, having been commanded before Isaac was begotten. Note that outsiders who enter the covenant of Abraham are considered part of the seed of Abraham; they are the "multitude of nations" (v. 4) of whom Abraham was to be the father. **Be blameless.** Rather, "perfect." By this sign of My name in your flesh, you achieve perfection, and it also serves to make a covenant between Me and you. — For every covenant is made with blood. But He did not tell him the nature of the covenant until v. 10. At that point, Abraham understood two things about the command "be perfect": first, what we have just explained; second, that missing this small piece of flesh would not make him less than perfect. He would still not be missing any of his organs. In fact, he would be *more* complete, since removing this flesh would mark the covenant. Had he been born circumcised

NAHMANIDES sufficient in and of itself. What Ibn Ezra says in the name of Samuel ha-Nagid of blessed memory **[Z]** about its being related to the root meaning "destroy" is in fact correct. This is a reference to the divine aspect of "Might," which rules the world—what the Sages call "the lower aspect of justice." The reason this name is invoked now is because that is the name through which hidden miracles are done for the righteous, "saving them from death and sustaining them in famine" (Ps. 33:19), and "redeeming them from the sword in time of war" (Job 5:20), like all the miracles done for Abraham and the other Patriarchs, as well as those promised in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28. For the blessings there (and the curses too) are all miraculous. It is not nature that makes the rains come in their due season because we have served God, or that makes the skies like iron if we sow crops during the sabbatical year. The same goes for all the promises and threats in the Torah. They are all miraculous means by which one's astrological fate can be thwarted. But none of them are unnatural as were the miracles performed by our master Moses: the plagues, splitting the sea, the manna, Miriam's well, and all the rest. These indeed were wonders that publicly altered nature, and they were performed by means of the Tetragrammaton that was revealed to him. **[A]** Abraham is being told here that He is mighty and victorious and can overcome what the stars have in store for him. Abraham will have a child, and his descendants will have an eternal covenant with Him; "the LORD's portion is His people" (Deut. 32:9). He will lead them by His own will; they will not be under the authority of a star or constellation. You must realize that Abraham himself never invokes the Tetragrammaton alone; he always attaches some other divine name to it: "God Most High" (14:22) or "Lord" (15:2,8). **[B]** See similarly 24:3 and 7 and 22:14 (about the site of the future Temple). **[C]** Jacob always uses the name "El Shaddai," which Moses never mentions. If you should so merit, you will understand this from what it says on B. Yev. 49b: All the prophets looked through an unclear glass, which is why Isaiah could say, "I beheld my Lord" (Isa. 6:1). But Moses looked through a clear glass, which is why he was told, "you cannot see My face, for man may not see Me and live" (Exod. 33:20). Note that Isaiah uses the word "Lord," not the Tetragrammaton. I will return to this in my comment to Exod. 6:2, if God takes notice of my plight. **Walk in My ways.** Follow the path that I teach you. Compare "*Follow* none but the LORD your God, and revere none but Him" (Deut. 13:5), which uses the standard verb "walk" in the Qal, as opposed to the Hitpael of our verse. **[D]** The commandment here was to take hold of His path *before* He taught it to him; to follow the path *after* it has been commanded is simply to "walk" after Him. In both cases the sense is that one must fear Him and do what He commands. **Be blameless.** This is a further commandment of the same kind, as in "You must be wholehearted with the LORD your God" (Deut. 18:13), which comes after the warning, "Let no one be found among you who consigns his son or daughter to the fire, or who is an augur, a soothsayer, a diviner, a sorcerer, one who casts spells, or one who consults ghosts or familiar spirits, or one who inquires of the dead" (Deut. 18:10–11). Both there and here, the sense is that one must believe that the Holy One is the only one who has power, from beginning to end, to make and to unmake. One must not pay any attention to what such sorcerers say, but must determine in

[Z] In our texts, Ibn Ezra merely says, "many would explain." **[A]** See Exod. 6:2–3. **[B]** "GOD" of 15:2 and 8 is the Tetragrammaton, which is not read as "Lord" when the actual word "lord" precedes it. **[C]** Others take 22:14 as the one case where Abraham *does* use the Tetragrammaton without another expression, precisely *because* he is referring to the future Temple. **[D]** See Special Topics, "Biblical Hebrew."

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **blameless.** Rather, "be perfect." Cutting off this piece of flesh will not leave you blemished, but whole (Bekhor Shor). In fact, it will make you perfect to cut off this superfluous piece of flesh, which is not found on animals (Gersonides).

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NJPS blameless. [2]I will establish My covenant between Me and you, and I will make you exceedingly numerous."

[3]Abram threw himself on his face; and God spoke to him further, [4]"As for Me, this is My covenant with you: You shall be the father of a multitude of nations. [5]And you shall no longer be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I make you the father of a

OJPS before Me, and be thou wholehearted. [2]And I will make My covenant between Me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly."

[3]And Abram fell on his face; and God talked with him, saying: [4]"As for Me, behold, My covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be the father of a multitude of nations. [5]Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for the father of a multitude of nations

[2] וְאֶתְּנָה בְרִיתִי בֵּינִי וּבֵינֶךָ וְאַרְבֶּה אוֹתְךָ
בִּמְאֹד מְאֹד׃
[3] וַיִּפֹּל אַבְרָם עַל־פָּנָיו וַיְדַבֵּר אִתּוֹ אֱלֹהִים
לֵאמֹר׃ [4] אֲנִי הִנֵּה בְרִיתִי אִתָּךְ וְהָיִיתָ
לְאַב הֲמוֹן גּוֹיִם׃ [5] וְלֹא־יִקָּרֵא עוֹד אֶת־
שִׁמְךָ אַבְרָם וְהָיָה שִׁמְךָ אַבְרָהָם כִּי

RASHI for your name, bringing its numerical value up by 5 to 248, the full number of the parts of the body.

2 I will establish My covenant. A covenant of love, and a covenant for the land, to give you possession of it by means of this commandment.

3 Abram threw himself on his face. From fear of the Shekhinah. Until he was circumcised, he did not have the strength to stand while the Holy Spirit was present. Remember what it says about Balaam: "Prostrate, but with eyes unveiled" (Num. 24:4). This is from Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer.

5 The father of a multitude of nations. His names are a kind of shorthand: Abram was *ab ram*, "father of 'ram"—that is, Aram, his own locale—only. Now he became the father of all the world, even as this original ר stayed in its place; only the *ham* part of *hamon* ("multitude") is the root of that word. But when Sarai's name was changed, the י was removed, and this י complained to the Shekhinah endlessly until finally it was given to Joshua: "Moses changed

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why does He promise that "I will make you exceedingly numerous" (v. 2) separately from the gift of the land, two things that are in tandem everywhere else? ✦ Why does Abraham suddenly "throw himself on his face" (v. 3), something he does in no other prophecy? Yet here he does it twice (see v. 17). ✦ When "God spoke to him further," is this a second prophecy or more of the first? If it is more of the first, why does Abraham throw himself on his face in the middle of a prophecy? But if they are separate, what is the "covenant" in v. 2 about? ✦ Our Sages interpret "you shall no longer be called Abram" (v. 5) as a commandment—it is not permitted to call him Abram after this. But why did this not apply also to Jacob after God tells him, "You shall be called Jacob no more" (35:10)?

IBN EZRA **5 Abraham . . . the father of a multitude of nations.** The addition of the ר of Abram's original name turns *av* into *abbir*: not "the father" but the "mightiest" of a multitude of nations. Notice that the Holy One does not remove any of the letters of Abram's original name, but just adds one. (See my comment to v. 15.)

KIMHI there would be no indication of this covenant. In fact, a boy who is born circumcised must have a drop of blood spilled to indicate the sign of the covenant.

2 I will make you exceedingly numerous. You should not think that circumcision will diminish your offspring.

3 Abram threw himself on his face. In thanks to God for this covenant, the confirmation of His love for him. **God spoke to him further.** Rather, God told him "to say" what follows to the members of his household when he would go to circumcise them.

4 As for Me. Just as I told you that I am El Shaddai, you can be certain that "My covenant is with you" (compare OJPS). **You shall be the father of a multitude of nations.** Not of just one. For Isaac, Ishmael, and the sons of Keturah **[N]** also came forth from him, and each of them became a great nation.

5 And you shall no longer be called Abram. "Your name" (compare OJPS) is the subject of the Hebrew sentence, but since the verb is passive it is marked with the *et* of the direct object; see similarly Num. 26:55 and Deut. 20:8. He shall "no longer be called Abram" by anyone, in his generation or the generations to follow. "Just tell everyone who is with you that God has changed your name to Abraham; they will tell others, and the others will tell others until 'Abraham' sticks. By this means, the miracle I have done for you will continue to

[N] See ch. 25.

NAHMANIDES one's heart that He and He alone is God and God Almighty, doing good when the stars predict evil and evil when one's sign is a beautiful one—all based on whether or not the person walks in His ways. He "annuls the omens of diviners, and makes fools of the augurs" (Isa. 44:25). That is why the Sages **[E]** have the Holy One telling Abraham, "Forget your stargazing!" Rashi's and Ibn Ezra's comments interpret "blameless" along the lines of "May I *wholeheartedly* follow Your laws so that I do not come to grief" (Ps. 119:80). But what I have explained is correct.

3 Abram threw himself on his face. To focus his mind on the prophecy. Once the commandment of circumcision was complete, Abraham stood back up, but when the second prophecy came to him, he threw himself on his face once again (in v. 17) to focus his mind and to pray for Ishmael. Moses and Aaron did the same when they "fell on their faces and said, 'O God, Source of the breath of all flesh!'" (Num. 16:22); see similarly Num. 17:10.

4 As for Me, this is My covenant with you. This "covenant" is the covenant of circumcision, as He says explicitly in v. 10. **[F] You shall be the father of a multitude of nations.** After this covenant, he could become the father of a multitude of nations. See Ibn Ezra's comment to v. 11. **[G]**

[E] In the midrash cited in Rashi's comment to 15:5. **[F]** In our texts, Nahmanides cites the expression "This is the sign of the covenant" (9:12,17), but this is most likely a copyist's error. **[G]** Our texts of Nahmanides have him repeating the comment without citing Ibn Ezra.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **2 I will establish My covenant between Me and you.** And you will be marked as My slave, just as slaves wear a mark on their clothes demonstrating that they are subservient to their master. — But our mark is in our flesh, so that it cannot be removed (Bekhor Shor). **I will make you exceedingly numerous.** The Hebrew phrase for "exceedingly numerous" occurs also only in vv. 6 and 20, Exod. 1:7, and Ezek. 9:9 and 16:13 (Masorah). Have you not yet realized that, even though Hagar is still fertile, you have had no further children for 13 years? (Abarbanel).

3 Abram threw himself on his face. To be able to focus on what he had just heard without distraction. Even lowering the head is a posture indicative of thought (Abarbanel). To thank God for the covenant (Sforno).

5 And you shall no longer be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham. It is customary for a change of name to accompany one's rise to greatness (Hizkuni). Possibly their names were changed here so that they could enter the covenant as if newly born (Gersonides).

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NJPS multitude of nations. 6I will make you exceedingly fertile, and make nations of you; and kings shall come forth from you. 7I will maintain My covenant between Me and you, and your offspring to come, as an everlasting covenant throughout the ages, to be God to you and to your offspring to come. 8I assign the land you sojourn in to you and your offspring to come, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting holding. I will be their God."

9God further said to Abraham, "As for you, you and your offspring to come throughout the ages shall keep My covenant. 10Such shall be the covenant between Me and you and your offspring to follow

OJPS have I made thee. 6And I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee. 7And I will establish My covenant between Me and thee and thy seed after thee throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee and to thy seed after thee. 8And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land of thy sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God."

9And God said unto Abraham: "And as for thee, thou shalt keep My covenant, thou, and thy seed after thee throughout their generations. 10This is My covenant, which ye shall keep, between Me and you

אַב־הֲמֹון גֹּויִם נְתַתִּיךָ׃ 6 וְהִפְרֵתִי אֹתְךָ
בִּמְאֹד מְאֹד וּנְתַתִּיךָ לְגוֹיִם וּמְלָכִים מִמְּךָ
יֵצֵאוּ׃ 7 וַהֲקִמֹתִי אֶת־בְּרִיתִי בֵּינִי וּבֵינֶךָ ✦ עבע"י
וּבֵין זַרְעֲךָ אַחֲרֶיךָ לְדֹרֹתָם לִבְרִית עוֹלָם
לִהְיוֹת לְךָ לֵאלֹהִים וּלְזַרְעֲךָ אַחֲרֶיךָ׃
8 וְנָתַתִּי לְךָ וּלְזַרְעֲךָ אַחֲרֶיךָ אֵת | אֶרֶץ
מְגֻרֶיךָ אֵת כָּל־אֶרֶץ כְּנַעַן לַאֲחֻזַּת עוֹלָם
וְהָיִיתִי לָהֶם לֵאלֹהִים׃
9 וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים אֶל־אַבְרָהָם וְאַתָּה אֶת־
בְּרִיתִי תִשְׁמֹר אַתָּה וְזַרְעֲךָ אַחֲרֶיךָ
לְדֹרֹתָם׃ 10 זֹאת בְּרִיתִי אֲשֶׁר תִּשְׁמְרוּ בֵּינִי

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why must "My covenant" be invoked a third time in v. 7, and again multiple times in the rest of the chapter, using different language each time? ✦ Why does v. 8 repeat "I will be their God" when v. 7 has just said this? ✦ Why, again, must God "further" (v. 9) warn Abraham to keep the covenant? ✦ How can an eight-day-old child make a "covenant" (v. 10) with the Creator of the world?

RASHI the name of Hosea son of Nun to Joshua" (Num. 13:16). **[C]**

6 And make nations of you. Israel and Edom. Ishmael has already been born, so this announcement cannot be about him.

7 I will maintain My covenant. And what is this covenant? **To be God to you.**

8 As an everlasting holding. And there **I will be their God.** But one who lives outside the land is like someone who has no god.

9 As for you. Literally, "and" as for you (see OJPS). "As for Me, this is My covenant with you" (v. 4), and as for you, you must be careful to keep it. And how are you to keep it? As v. 10 explains.

10 Between Me and you. "You" in the plural—all of you who are alive now. **And**

[C] In Hebrew this change involves merely adding a ה to the beginning of his name.

IBN EZRA 10 Every male among you shall be circumcised. More precisely, "is to be" circumcised; it is a Niphal infinitive of מול.

KIMHI resound throughout the generations." **Your name shall be Abraham, for I make you the father of a multitude of nations.** The *–ham* of the new name implies *hamon*, "multitude." The Sages say that changing someone's name changes his fate, which they derive from this changing of Abraham's and Sarah's names.

6 I will make you exceedingly fertile, and make nations of you. See my second comment to v. 4. Or it could refer to Jacob alone, "nations" being the tribes, as Onkelos takes it. **[O] Kings shall come forth from you.** Here too the implication is as Onkelos translates: kings that will rule over other nations.

7 Your offspring to come. This certainly refers to the descendants of Jacob.

8 The land you sojourn in. Not merely the individual places where you sojourn, but the entire land. **An everlasting holding.** Even if they are exiled from it for a time, they shall return to it, and **I will be their God.**

9 God further said to Abraham. After the point when God changed his name, Moses never wrote anything but "Abraham." The Sages took "you shall no longer be called Abram" (v. 5) to mean that anyone who does so violates a prohibition and also violates the positive commandment that "your name shall be Abraham" (also v. 5). So the statement made in Second Temple times, "You are the LORD God, who chose Abram" (Neh. 9:7), gave them some difficulty, until they understood it to mean "he was Abram when you chose him." But the straightforward sense of v. 5 is that these are not commandments. **As for you, you and your offspring to come throughout the ages shall keep My covenant.** That is the condition for My being your God.

10 Between Me and you and your offspring to follow. "You" here is in the plural, representing Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, for they were all alive at the same time; Jacob was 15 when Abraham died. "Your offspring" means the offspring of Jacob. **Every male**

[O] Neither Onkelos nor any of the other Aramaic translations we now have translate the word this way. Onkelos translates the word as "assemblies," which perhaps Kimhi takes as a reference to the tribes.

NAHMANIDES 6 I will . . . make nations of you. I don't think Rashi's comment is correct. Why would He give him that particular piece of good news in connection with the commandment of circumcision, which the Edomites do not practice? (As explained on B. Sanh. 59b, they are not even commanded to do so.) Note the many verses where "nations" applies to Israel alone: 35:11, 48:4, Deut. 33:3 and 19, and Judg. 5:14.

9 As for you, you and your offspring to come throughout the ages shall keep My covenant. Rashi is certainly correct about the straightforward sense of the text. As others have noted, the purpose of circumcision is that a man should use the organ of desire and sin only for what is commanded and permitted. But according to the Way of Truth, "My covenant is with you" (v. 4; compare OJPS) is like "remember, I am with you" (28:15), "I will be with you" (Exod. 3:12), and "may the LORD our God be with us" (1 Kings 8:57). It is saying that the covenant will be "with him" and that he will therefore be fertile and increase. He now commands Abraham to "keep" this covenant, and that circumcision should be a "sign" of covenant, just as the Sabbath is a "sign." **[H]** Circumcision therefore overrides the Sabbath. Understand this.

[H] See Exodus 31.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS 7 I will maintain My covenant between Me and you, and your offspring to come. You, and they on your account, will always be under the care of divine providence (Abarbanel).

9 You and your offspring to come throughout the ages shall keep My covenant. I have obligated Myself to you, and it befits you now to obligate yourselves to Me (Abarbanel).

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NJPS which you shall keep: every male among you shall be circumcised. [11]You shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin, and that shall be the sign of the covenant between Me and you. [12]And throughout the generations, every male among you shall be circumcised at the age of eight days. As for the homeborn slave and the one bought from an outsider who is not of your offspring, [13]they must be circumcised, homeborn, and purchased alike. Thus shall My covenant be marked in your flesh as an everlasting pact. [14]And if any male who is uncircumcised fails to circumcise the flesh

וּבֵינֵיכֶם וּבֵין זַרְעֲךָ אַחֲרֶיךָ הִמּוֹל לָכֶם
כָּל־זָכָר׃ 11 וּנְמַלְתֶּם אֵת בְּשַׂר עָרְלַתְכֶם
וְהָיָה לְאוֹת בְּרִית בֵּינִי וּבֵינֵיכֶם׃ 12 וּבֶן־
שְׁמֹנַת יָמִים יִמּוֹל לָכֶם כָּל־זָכָר
לְדֹרֹתֵיכֶם יְלִיד בָּיִת וּמִקְנַת־כֶּסֶף מִכֹּל
בֶּן־נֵכָר אֲשֶׁר לֹא מִזַּרְעֲךָ הוּא׃ 13 הִמּוֹל |
יִמּוֹל יְלִיד בֵּיתְךָ וּמִקְנַת כַּסְפֶּךָ וְהָיְתָה
בְרִיתִי בִּבְשַׂרְכֶם לִבְרִית עוֹלָם׃ 14 וְעָרֵל |
זָכָר אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יִמּוֹל אֶת־בְּשַׂר עָרְלָתוֹ

OJPS and thy seed after thee: every male among you shall be circumcised. [11]And ye shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of a covenant betwixt Me and you. [12]And he that is eight days old shall be circumcised among you, every male throughout your generations, he that is born in the house, or bought with money of any foreigner, that is not of thy seed. [13]He that is born in thy house, and he that is bought with thy money, must needs be circumcised; and My covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant. [14]And the uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Is circumcision a covenant, as in v. 10, or a *sign* of the covenant, as in v. 11? ✦ How can it be an aspect of divine wisdom to require that you "circumcise the flesh of your foreskin" (v. 11)? ✦ If circumcision perfects the body, why was Adam not given this commandment? For that matter, why be born with a foreskin at all? ✦ Why does v. 13 repeat that they "must be circumcised," when we have already been told this in vv. 10, 11, and 12? ✦ Why must v. 13 repeat that this applies to "homeborn, and purchased alike," which v. 12 has already told us? ✦ Why must one who "fails to circumcise the flesh of his foreskin . . . be cut off from his kin" (v. 14)? Shouldn't the punishment fit the crime? One who is uncircumcised has at most committed a sin of omission, not one of commission.

RASHI **your offspring to follow.** Those who will be born in the future. **Every male among you shall be circumcised.** Rather, "circumcising every male among you." It is a gerund, expressed by the infinitive; in Biblical Hebrew, the "to" of the infinitive is not a necessary part of it.

11 You shall circumcise. As NJPS recognizes, this is an active verb form. The נ, though it is part of the root, frequently disappears, as נ in the first root position often does. **[D]** But "shall be circumcised" (v. 12) is definitely a passive verb.

12 The homeborn slave. Born "in the house" (OJPS) to a slave woman. **The one bought from an outsider.** Bought after birth.

13 They must be circumcised. Even if not "on the eighth day" (a phrase missing from our verse), as the repetition of the verb in Hebrew confirms. For there is such a thing as a homeborn slave that is circumcised on the first day (see B. Shab. 135b).

14 Any male who is uncircumcised. We learn from this where circumcision is performed—in the place that differentiates male from female. **That person shall be cut**

[D] Modern scholars take this form as Niphal and do not think נ is part of the root.

IBN EZRA **11 You shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin.** "The LORD"—bless Him!—"is an all-knowing God; by Him actions are measured" (1 Sam. 2:3). He commanded Abraham to be circumcised before Sarah conceived, so that his offspring would be holy. But here the verb is נמל. Compare "My breath shall not *abide* in man forever" (6:3) with "My spirit was *disturbed within* me" (Dan. 7:15) for a similar verb pair. **[U]**

12 Every male among you shall be circumcised. Here the verb is Niphal, as in "they must be circumcised" of v. 13. **As for the homeborn slave.** Rather, "including the homeborn slave . . ." They too must be circumcised "throughout the generations . . . at the age of eight days."

13 Homeborn, and purchased alike. The ones in your household today must also be circumcised, even though they are already grown.

14 And if any male who is uncircumcised fails to circumcise the flesh of his foreskin. Here the verb is the Qal of

[U] In his comment to 6:3 he refutes this comparison.

KIMHI **among you shall be circumcised.** Again "you" is plural, referring to Abraham and his descendants. In the Hebrew, "male" is the last word of the verse; this is when Abraham realized what circumcision meant—it referred to the organ that distinguishes male and female.

11 You shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin. It is therefore a commandment both to the father to circumcise his son and to the son to circumcise himself when he reaches 13 if his father or the court has not done it. **That shall be the sign of the covenant between Me and you.** A reminder, like that of the ritual fringes or the phylacteries. But this would be the strongest of them all, being right on the man's body. Most sins are committed with this organ, the chief of the animal appetites. This way, when a man was on the point of committing a sexual transgression, he would see the sign, refrain from the sin, and not be a beast.

12 Every male among you shall be circumcised. The verb is passive; he shall be circumcised by his father. **The homeborn slave and the one bought from an outsider who is not of your offspring.** They too are to be circumcised at the age of eight days; see OJPS. This can be done to one bought from an outsider only if he is bought before that age. If bought afterward, he is to be circumcised immediately. His time has already passed. There is no point in waiting an additional eight days. And that is indeed what happens in v. 23—they are all circumcised on a single day. There was no one in Abraham's household at that time who was under the age of eight days. That is the straightforward sense of the rule. But the Sages take it to refer to certain more complicated circumstances.

13 They must be circumcised, homeborn, and purchased alike. This verse refers to the slaves whom Abraham actually had (the previous verse refers to the general case, the slaves of his offspring). They must perform this commandment just like all the others that he had taught them were the way of the Lord. There could not be in Abraham's household two faiths and two nations, one circumcised and one uncircumcised. **Thus shall My covenant be marked in your flesh.** Including the slaves, who are also "yours."

14 Any male who is uncircumcised. Of the Israelites, to whom the commandment applies. The slaves are not personally commanded to be circumcised; it is Abraham and his offspring who are commanded to circumcise them, so that there are not two faiths in one house. If the slave refuses to be circumcised, his Israelite owner must sell him. He cannot let him remain in the household more than 12

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **11 You shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin.** For women, it is menstrual blood that serves as the blood of the covenant (Bekhor Shor). There is no mystery as to how Abraham knew where circumcision was to be carried out; a prophecy that involves a commandment is always perfectly clear and understood (Abarbanel).

13 My covenant be marked in your flesh. In the holy tongue, "flesh" is a euphemism for the sexual organ (Sforno).

14 That person shall be cut off from his kin. He is not marked and cannot be counted as My slave (Bekhor Shor).

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NJPS of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his kin; he has broken My covenant."

15And God said to Abraham, "As for your wife Sarai, you shall not call her Sarai, but her name shall be Sarah. 16I will bless her; indeed, I will give you a son by her. I will bless her so that she shall give rise to nations; rulers of peoples shall issue

OJPS flesh of his foreskin, that soul shall be cut off from his people; he hath broken My covenant."

15And God said unto Abraham: "As for Sarai thy wife, thou shalt not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall her name be. 16And I will bless her, and moreover I will give thee a son of her; yea, I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of

וְנִכְרְתָה הַנֶּפֶשׁ הַהִוא מֵעַמֶּיהָ אֶת־בְּרִיתִי הֵפַר׃ ס

15 וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים אֶל־אַבְרָהָם שָׂרַי אִשְׁתְּךָ לֹא־תִקְרָא אֶת־שְׁמָהּ שָׂרָי כִּי שָׂרָה שְׁמָהּ׃ 16 וּבֵרַכְתִּי אֹתָהּ וְגַם נָתַתִּי מִמֶּנָּה לְךָ בֵּן וּבֵרַכְתִּיהָ וְהָיְתָה לְגוֹיִם מַלְכֵי עַמִּים

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Is what "God said to Abraham" starting in v. 15 part of the previous prophecy, or a separate one? ✦ The translations have v. 15 saying "her name shall be Sarah," but the Hebrew really says, "her name *is* Sarah." How could this be, and why is a different expression used here than with Abraham in v. 5? ✦ Why was Abraham's name changed by adding one Hebrew letter, while Sarah's was changed by replacing a letter? ✦ Why does God say, "I will bless her *and moreover* I will give you a son by her" (v. 16; see OJPS)? Isn't the son himself the blessing, not something additional to the blessing? ✦ Why does v. 16 repeat "I will bless her"?

RASHI **off from his kin.** Once he reaches the age of legal responsibility. But his father is not "cut off"; he has merely committed a sin of omission. Being "cut off" means dying childless and before one's time.

15 You shall not call her Sarai. Because the י suffix implies, "She belongs to me and not to others." **Her name shall be Sarah.** For all.

16 I will bless her. And what is this blessing? That she becomes young once again. For now, as she will shortly say, "I am withered" (18:12). **I will bless her.** This second blessing is that she will be able to breastfeed Isaac when it becomes necessary. That will be at the great feast on the day Isaac is weaned. For there had been a rumor that Abraham and Sarah had brought a foundling from the marketplace and said, "This is our son." Each woman brought her own son to the feast but none of them brought a wet nurse—and Sarah breastfed all of them: "Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would suckle *children*!" (21:7). Genesis Rabbah tells part of this story.

IBN EZRA נמל. **That person shall be cut off from his kin.** If he is no longer a minor and nevertheless does not circumcise himself. For when he is a minor the commandment applies to the father. If his father does not have him circumcised, he must do so himself when he is under his own authority. Otherwise, he is "cut off" by heaven. Some errant people think that if a boy dies uncircumcised he has no place in the World to Come; but "soul" (OJPS) in this verse does not mean what they want it to mean; rather, it means "a body that has a soul," in short, "a person," as in "when a person incurs guilt" (e.g., Lev. 4:2). Some say that "cutting off" means dying before the age of 52; **[V]** others, that it is the person's name that is cut off, by the death of his offspring. That would explain being cut off "from his kin." For one who has children lives on, as it were, in them, and his name is not cut off.

15 Sarai . . . Sarah. Sarah is no longer Sarai, "*my* princess"; the י is removed and replaced with ה, making her now simply "princess" in general.

16 I will give you a son. Like "let me pay" of 23:13, this phrase uses a technically past tense verb in a future sense.

[V] It is not clear where this number comes from.

KIMHI months. That is our tradition. **That person shall be cut off from his kin.** Technically, this applies to an Israelite who reaches commandment age uncircumcised and does not circumcise himself. His father has violated a positive commandment but is not "cut off" (which according to rabbinic tradition means that he dies halfway through his allotted span of days). **He has broken My covenant.** The covenant between Me and Abraham is also between Me and him, since he is Abraham's offspring.

15 You shall not call her Sarai. It is the man who calls his wife by her name, not the wife her husband. Out of respect, she does not call him by name, just as the superior in every relationship—the father, the master, the owner—should not let the inferior call him by name. As we read of Jeroboam, "The word by which he raised his hand" (that is, rebelled) "against the king was as follows: 'Solomon built the Millo'" (1 Kings 11:26). He should have called him "my lord the king," not "Solomon." Note that Sarah literally says, "My lord is old" (18:12), not "Abraham is old." But in v. 17 of our chapter, Abraham refers to her by name. That is why it says, "You shall not call her Sarai," while with Abraham it said, "You shall no longer be called Abram"—by those who do call you by name. Similarly, the Sages do not say that anyone who calls Sarah Sarai violates a commandment; it was Abraham who was given this commandment, not anyone else. **Her name shall be Sarah.** Just as you shall call her Sarah, so shall everyone else. On the nature of this change, see my first comment to v. 5.

16 I will bless her. By giving her "enjoyment" (18:12) and restoring her period. In fact, I will do an even greater wonder than this: **I will give you a son by her. I will bless her so that she shall give rise to nations.** Whether through both Esau and Jacob, or (as Onkelos takes it) just through Jacob. (See again my comments to v. 6.)

NAHMANIDES **14 Any male who is uncircumcised.** See Rashi's comment; the Sages say the same, and other such things besides. **To circumcise the flesh of his foreskin.** Ibn Ezra says in his comment to Lev. 12:3 that "foreskin" is to be taken literally when it appears alone; if it refers metaphorically to some other organ, that must be specified. But our verse is also specifying. It does not say "to circumcise his foreskin," which would indeed leave the matter in doubt. Nor does it say "the foreskin of his flesh," as it does with "the *thickening* about your hearts" (Deut. 10:16) and so on. Rather, it is the reverse, "the flesh of his foreskin," the flesh that constitutes his foreskin. There is no other bodily organ that literally has a piece of flesh that can be cut away, leaving the organ itself.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **15 You shall not call her Sarai, but her name shall be Sarah.** The י taken from her name had a numerical value of 10; it was divided into two and they each got half: a ה, with the numerical value of 5, was added to each of their names (Hizkuni). Sarai sounds like a masculine name, indicating her barrenness—almost as if to say that having not given birth she was not female. But the translations err here. Abraham was indeed told, "Your name *shall be* Abraham" (v. 5), but our verse says, "Her name *is* Sarah." The moment Abraham accepted the covenant, Sarai became Sarah (Abarbanel).

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NJPS from her." [17]Abraham threw himself on his face and laughed, as he said to himself, "Can a child be born to a man a hundred years old, or can Sarah bear a child at ninety?" [18]And Abraham said to God, "O that Ishmael

מִמֶּנָּה יִהְיוּ׃ [17] וַיִּפֹּל אַבְרָהָם עַל־פָּנָיו
וַיִּצְחָק וַיֹּאמֶר בְּלִבּוֹ הַלְּבֶן מֵאָה־שָׁנָה
יִוָּלֵד וְאִם־שָׂרָה הֲבַת־תִּשְׁעִים שָׁנָה תֵּלֵד׃
[18] וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָהָם אֶל־הָאֱלֹהִים לוּ

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ What was so mysterious about what God said that Abraham had to "throw himself on his face" (v. 17)? It could not have been about hiding his laughter; "Is anything too wondrous for the LORD" (18:14)? After all, "He reveals deep and hidden things, knows what is in the darkness" (Dan. 2:22). ✦ How could Abraham doubt God's power enough to laugh at this promise? ✦ What sense does it make for Abraham to wonder, "Can a child be born to a man a hundred years old"? He had not even reached two-thirds of his eventual life span, and he will "fill his quiver" with even more sons (as Ps. 127:5 puts it) in 25:1–4. ✦ Why pray "that Ishmael might live" (v. 18)? Why should Ishmael die? What had he done?

OJPS peoples shall be of her." [17]Then Abraham fell upon his face, and laughed, and said in his heart: "Shall a child be born unto him that is a hundred years old? and shall Sarah, that is ninety years old, bear?" [18]And Abraham said unto God: "Oh that Ishmael might

RASHI **17 Abraham threw himself on his face and laughed.** Onkelos translates the verb here as "rejoiced," but translates the same verb in 18:12, when Sarah does it, as "laughed." Abraham believed it, but Sarah did not. That is why the Holy One minded what Sarah did, but not what Abraham did. **Can a child be born to a man a hundred years old?** This is a straightforward question, like "Do you understand?" of 2 Sam. 15:27, not a sarcastic one. He was asking, in amazement, "Could this kindness the Holy One is doing for me be done for anyone else at this age?" **Can Sarah bear a child at ninety?** Even though in earlier generations men fathered children at the age of 500, in Abraham's day life spans had already grown shorter, and weakness had come into the world. You can see from the generations between Noah and Abraham that they were already starting to have their first child at an age between 30 and 70. **[E]**

18 O that Ishmael might live. I am not worthy of receiving this reward. **By Your favor.** Rather, "before You" (see OJPS), in worshipful awe of You. See my comment to "walk in My ways" of v. 1.

[E] See 11:10–25. Our texts of Rashi say 60 and 70, but this may be a scribal error. Rashi's comment is still puzzling, though, since most of those generations seem to have continued to have children well past age 100.

IBN EZRA **17 Can a child be born to a man a hundred years old?** He was surprised, since an old man's seed is cold, making him unable to father children. **Can Sarah bear a child at ninety?** It would be an even greater surprise for a woman to give birth once her blood ceases to flow. A child, of course, is constructed of blood. When you look at it, you will see that the matter of Sarah is more miraculous than that of Abraham. We do find a number of men in the Bible fathering children beyond the age of 90, and in Abraham's day lives were longer than in subsequent generations.

KIMHI **17 Abraham threw himself on his face.** As in v. 3, out of thanks for what He had said about Sarah. **And laughed.** With pleasure, not sarcastically. **Can a child be born to a man a hundred years old, or can Sarah bear a child at ninety?** They were 99 and 89, respectively, now. Even if Sarah were to get pregnant right away, they would be 100 and 90 when the child was born. He was saying this with amazed delight. A woman giving birth at 90 would be even more amazing than a man fathering a child at 100, especially a woman who was naturally infertile.

18 O that Ishmael might live by Your favor! What You have given me already is enough for me. [By "live" he meant "live a good life, with blessing and fertility."] You have already fulfilled Your promise to give the land to my offspring, for Ishmael is my offspring.

NAHMANIDES **17 Abraham threw himself on his face and laughed.** Onkelos translates: "He rejoiced." Indeed, laughter can express not only mockery but also joy: "*rejoicing* in His inhabited world, finding delight with mankind" (Prov. 8:31); "David and all the House of Israel *danced* before the LORD" (2 Sam. 6:5). In my opinion that is exactly what our verse is saying. For anyone who has something wonderful happen will laugh with delight. As Sarah said, "God has brought me laughter; everyone who hears will laugh with me" (21:6). See also "our mouths shall be filled with *laughter*, our tongues, with songs of joy" (Ps. 126:2). **He said to himself.** This is so wonderful it most certainly deserves laughter! **Can a child be born to a man a hundred years old, or can Sarah bear a child at ninety,** and not elicit delighted laughter? — Hagar's question in 16:13 is similarly abbreviated: "Now that I have gone on seeing after He saw me, can I do anything but call Him El-roi?" Or Abraham is asking this in amazement at the miracle, not questioning whether it can happen; see the similar rhetorical questions of Ezek. 22:2 and Prov. 23:5. For that matter, compare "Did you eat of the tree from which I had forbidden you to eat?" (3:11). It is a way of saying that something was previously unimaginable—not that it did not or could not happen. Literally, of course, men can father children at 90 or 100 even in our own day; all the more so with Abraham, who had not lived even two-thirds of his life span at this point. Forty years after this, he will have still more children, with Keturah. The surprise is that they could have children after living together so long without being able to—especially since he well knew that she had ceased to have her period. Note that he said nothing in response to the promise "I will . . . make nations of you" (v. 6). It is only when he learns that he will have a child with Sarah that he reacts this way. The fact that he is told (in v. 19) to name the boy Isaac (*yitzḥak*) because he "laughed" (*va-yitzḥak*) proves that this was joyous laughter; see again Sarah's subsequent comment in 21:6.

18 O that Ishmael might live by Your favor! The unusual Hebrew *lu* means "if"; you will find it as well in the compounds *lulei* ("if not") and *ilu* ("if only"). Abraham is saying, "Only if Ishmael might live before You" (compare OJPS for the last phrase), am I willing to accept this blessing for me of offspring with Sarah as well. Remember that the original blessing was that "your very own issue shall be your heir" (15:4)—"heir" in the singular. Abraham assumed that this would be Ishmael. Having now been told that he would have a son with Sarah, and that this son would be the heir, he was afraid that Ishmael was going to die. Rashi's understanding of Ishmael living

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **17 He said to himself.** Literally, he "said in his heart" (OJPS). But it is the wicked who speak "in" their hearts, as we see (e.g.) with Esau (27:41) and Haman (Esther 6:6); the righteous speak "on" or "to" their hearts, as did Daniel (Dan. 1:8) and David (1 Sam. 27:1). The text is hinting to us that Abraham doubted what God had said (Hizkuni). **Can a child be born to a man a hundred years old, or can Sarah bear a child at ninety?** This is not the interrogative ה but the asseverative ה, as in "*Lo*, I revealed Myself to your father's house in Egypt" of 1 Sam. 2:27 (Gersonides).

18 O that Ishmael might live. Offspring from Ishmael would be quite enough for him; he did not seek the miracle implied in v. 16 (Gersonides).

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NJPS might live by Your favor!" 19God said, "Nevertheless, Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall name him Isaac; and I will maintain My covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his offspring to come. 20As for Ishmael, I have heeded you. I hereby bless him. I will make him fertile and exceedingly numerous. He shall be the father of twelve chieftains, and I will make of him a great nation. 21But My covenant I will maintain with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this season next year." 22And when He was done speaking with him, God was gone from Abraham.

יִשְׁמָעֵאל יִחְיֶה לְפָנֶיךָ׃ 19 וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים אֲבָל שָׂרָה אִשְׁתְּךָ יֹלֶדֶת לְךָ בֵּן וְקָרָאתָ אֶת־שְׁמוֹ יִצְחָק וַהֲקִמֹתִי אֶת־בְּרִיתִי אִתּוֹ לִבְרִית עוֹלָם לְזַרְעוֹ אַחֲרָיו׃ 20 וְלִיִשְׁמָעֵאל שְׁמַעְתִּיךָ הִנֵּה ׀ בֵּרַכְתִּי אֹתוֹ וְהִפְרֵיתִי אֹתוֹ וְהִרְבֵּיתִי אֹתוֹ בִּמְאֹד מְאֹד שְׁנֵים־עָשָׂר נְשִׂיאִם יוֹלִיד וּנְתַתִּיו לְגוֹי גָּדוֹל׃ 21 וְאֶת־בְּרִיתִי אָקִים אֶת־יִצְחָק אֲשֶׁר׀ תֵּלֵד לְךָ שָׂרָה לַמּוֹעֵד הַזֶּה בַּשָּׁנָה הָאַחֶרֶת׃ 22 וַיְכַל לְדַבֵּר אִתּוֹ וַיַּעַל אֱלֹהִים מֵעַל אַבְרָהָם׃

RASHI **19 Nevertheless.** The Hebrew word is an assertion of truth: "*In fact*, we are being punished on account of our brother" (42:21); "*The fact is*, she has no son" (2 Kings 4:14). **You shall name him Isaac.** That is, *yitzḥak*, for the joyful laughter (*va-yitzḥak*) of v. 17. But some say the significance of the name יצחק is in the numerical values of each letter: י for the 10 trials that Abraham would undergo; צ for the 90 years of Sarah's age; ח for the age of 8 days at which Isaac was circumcised, and ק for the 100 years of Abraham's age. **And I will maintain My covenant with him.** Why was it necessary to say this? In v. 9, He had already told Abraham, "You and your offspring to come throughout the ages shall keep My covenant." But "I will maintain My covenant between Me and you, and your offspring" (v. 7) would seem to include Ishmael and Abraham's sons by Keturah. **[F]** Now, however, he is told, "I will maintain My covenant *with him*"—not with the others. Why then must it repeat, "My covenant I will maintain with Isaac" (v. 21)? To teach that Isaac was holy from the womb. Another reading: R. Abba said, It is an argument *a fortiori*—if the son of the slave woman is given such amazing blessings as he is in v. 20, how much more does the son of the mistress get! Another reading: "My covenant" of circumcision must be passed down to Isaac's offspring.

20 Twelve chieftains. Rather, they will vanish like 12 "clouds," as the same word is used in "Like *clouds*, wind—but no rain—is one who boasts of gifts not given" (Prov. 25:14).

22 God was gone from Abraham. More precisely, "from *above* Abraham." The text speaks of the Shekhinah with great delicacy. We learn that the righteous are the chariot of the Omnipresent.

[F] See 25:1–6.

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ What does the strange expression "by Your favor" have to do with this prayer? ✦ What is the meaning of "nevertheless" (v. 19)? If Abraham doubts him, why would saying "nevertheless" convince him? — If that is even what it means; the same Hebrew word cannot possibly be translated "nevertheless" in 42:21. ✦ Why does Ishmael's success and prosperity intrude (v. 20) in a story about the birth of Isaac? It is off topic. ✦ Why does v. 21 repeat "My covenant I will maintain with Isaac," which has already been stated in v. 19? ✦ What does "God was gone from Abraham" (v. 22) add to "He was done speaking with him"? ✦ Why does this entire parashah use "the LORD" up through v. 1 of our chapter, and then suddenly switch to "God" and not use "the LORD" at all—especially since that name will return immediately in 18:1? This demands great scrutiny.

OJPS live before Thee!" 19And God said: "Nay, but Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son; and thou shalt call his name Isaac; and I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant for his seed after him. 20And as for Ishmael, I have heard thee; behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly; twelve princes shall he beget, and I will make him a great nation. 21But My covenant will I establish with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear unto thee at this set time in the next year." 22And He left off talking with him, and God went up from Abraham.

KIMHI **19 Nevertheless, Sarah your wife shall bear you a son.** Also. **You shall name him Isaac.** That is, Yitzhak, because you laughed (*va-yitzḥak*).

20 As for Ishmael, I have heeded you. I have given him greatness and fertility, to the extent that he shall produce 12 tribal chieftains just as Isaac will. **[P] I hereby bless him.** Rather, "I have blessed him" (OJPS), through the angel who appeared to Hagar. So I will bless Ishmael, but the covenant I made with you I will maintain with Isaac.

21 At this season. But we do not know at what particular season this prophecy occurred. **Next year.** Thus the time between the prophecy and the birth was to be one year. But it does not say how long the pregnancy would last. Our Sages deduce that Isaac was born on Passover and say that Sarah was "taken note of" (see 21:1) on Rosh Hashanah.

22 When He was done speaking with him. On that particular day. This is mentioned because it was an unusually long prophecy. **God was gone from Abraham.** As for the Patriarchs being the Chariot, how precious this is to one who understands it!

[P] See 25:12–17.

NAHMANIDES "before You" cannot be correct, since God responds in v. 20 by blessing Ishmael. Abraham is asking that Ishmael live on and leave descendants after him.

19 Nevertheless. It is Sarah who will bear the son that I am telling you about now, and it is through him that I will maintain My covenant—with him and with his descendants after him. I will bless Ishmael with descendants, but not with My covenant.

22 God was gone from Abraham. See Rashi's comment. The expression in Genesis Rabbah is not about "the righteous" but about the Patriarchs. It alludes to what is written in "You will keep faith with Jacob, loyalty to Abraham" (Mic. 7:20) and "Had not . . . the Fear of Isaac been with me" (31:42). One who is enlightened will understand.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **19 You shall name him Isaac.** He did not directly reprove him for laughing, just as He did not directly reprove Sarah in 18:12 but asked Abraham why she had laughed. Nonetheless, telling Abraham to name the boy Isaac was a way of saying, "I know what you did" (Bekhor Shor). Rather, "*She* shall name him Isaac" (Gersonides). **I will maintain My covenant with him.** He will be the first to be circumcised at the proper age of eight days (Hizkuni).

21 At this season next year. Naming the precise time was a way of giving him a sign that the birth was miraculous, the result of God's will (Abarbanel).

22 And when He was done speaking with him, God was gone from Abraham. He did not want to give Abraham an opportunity of resuming the subject of Ishmael (Abarbanel). Contrast 4:16, "Cain left the presence of the LORD" (Sforno).

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NJPS [23]Then Abraham took his son Ishmael, and all his homeborn slaves and all those he had bought, every male in Abraham's household, and he circumcised the flesh of their foreskins on that very day, as God had spoken to him. [24]Abraham was ninety-nine years old when he circumcised the flesh of his foreskin, [25]and his son Ishmael was thirteen years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. [26]Thus Abraham and his son Ishmael were circumcised on that very day; [27]and all his household, his homeborn slaves and those that had been bought from outsiders, were circumcised with him.

23 וַיִּקַּח אַבְרָהָם אֶת־יִשְׁמָעֵאל בְּנוֹ וְאֵת כָּל־יְלִידֵי בֵיתוֹ וְאֵת כָּל־מִקְנַת כַּסְפּוֹ כָּל־זָכָר בְּאַנְשֵׁי בֵּית אַבְרָהָם וַיָּמָל אֶת־ בְּשַׂר עָרְלָתָם בְּעֶצֶם הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר אִתּוֹ אֱלֹהִים׃ 24 וְאַבְרָהָם בֶּן־תִּשְׁעִים ✦ פתוח וְתֵשַׁע שָׁנָה בְּהִמֹּלוֹ בְּשַׂר עָרְלָתוֹ׃ 25 וְיִשְׁמָעֵאל בְּנוֹ בֶּן־שְׁלֹשׁ עֶשְׂרֵה שָׁנָה בְּהִמֹּלוֹ אֵת בְּשַׂר עָרְלָתוֹ׃ 26 בְּעֶצֶם הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה נִמּוֹל אַבְרָהָם וְיִשְׁמָעֵאל בְּנוֹ׃ 27 וְכָל־ אַנְשֵׁי בֵיתוֹ יְלִיד בָּיִת וּמִקְנַת־כֶּסֶף מֵאֵת בֶּן־נֵכָר נִמֹּלוּ אִתּוֹ׃ פ

OJPS [23]And Abraham took Ishmael his son, and all that were born in his house, and all that were bought with his money, every male among the men of Abraham's house, and circumcised the flesh of their foreskin in the selfsame day, as God had said unto him. [24]And Abraham was ninety years old and nine, when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. [25]And Ishmael his son was thirteen years old, when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. [26]In the selfsame day was Abraham circumcised, and Ishmael his son. [27]And all the men of his house, those born in the house, and those bought with money of a foreigner, were circumcised with him.

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why are we told twice that Abraham and Ishmael and the rest of the household were circumcised "on that very day," once in v. 23 and once in v. 26?

RASHI **23 On that very day**. On the same day that he was commanded to do it—and during the day, not at night, without fear of gentiles or of scoffers, and so that his enemies **[G]** and the others of his generation could not say, "If we had seen him, we would not have let him." **He circumcised**. This is definitely an active verb.

24 When he circumcised. Rather, "when he was circumcised" (OJPS). Compare the syntax of "when they were created" (2:4).

25 When he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. The expression about Abraham in v. 24 does not say "in" (or, more precisely, "with") as this does. Abraham merely had to have his foreskin cut off, since it had been already been loosened by sexual activity. But Ishmael, who was still just a boy, had to undergo the entire procedure.

26 On that very day. On the very day when Abraham turned 99 and Ishmael turned 13.

[G] Some texts read "his friends," a difference of one letter in Hebrew.

IBN EZRA **23 Abraham took his son Ishmael, and all his homeborn slaves and all those he had bought, every male in Abraham's household, and he circumcised the flesh of their foreskins on that very day.** As soon as the angel had left.

26 On that very day. He did not delay in carrying it out.

27 All his household. Amounting to 318. **And those that had been bought from outsiders**. Exclusive of the 318. **With him**. Abraham himself, along with his son Ishmael and the slaves, both homeborn and purchased, were all willingly circumcised on the same day, "with him." He did not coerce anyone; they all hastened to do it and thereby fulfill the will of God.

KIMHI **23 He circumcised the flesh of their foreskins on that very day**. Circumcising himself last. Had he circumcised himself first, he would not have been able to circumcise all the rest of them on that day.

24 Abraham was ninety-nine years old. Just as he was in v. 1; in fact, he was at the end of his 99th year. The text is emphasizing that he did not wait a single day, but was circumcised on the very day he was commanded. **When he circumcised the flesh of his foreskin**. More precisely, "when he was circumcised [with regard to] the flesh of his foreskin " (compare OJPS). The verb is a Niphal—a passive—and cannot be transitive.

25 His son Ishmael was thirteen years old. This is said to honor him. Since we know that Abraham is 99 and Ishmael was born when he was 86, we could have figured out Ishmael's age without being told. But there is also an implication here that one becomes obligated to observe the commandments at the age of 13. **When he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin**. This is clearer than v. 24, since the preposition does appear. It is better translated, "he was circumcised *of* the flesh of his foreskin."

26 Abraham and his son Ishmael were circumcised on that very day. V. 23 told us merely that Abraham had circumcised the others "on that very day." Now we are explicitly told that he too was circumcised on that very day, demonstrating his alacrity to perform God's commandment. Here the Niphal verb is to be understood as reflexive: he circumcised himself. For a similar example, see "Amasa was not on his guard" (2 Sam. 20:10), that is, he did not protect himself.

NAHMANIDES **26 Abraham and his son Ishmael were circumcised on that very day**. What would be the point of saying that this happened on the very day when Abraham turned 99 and Ishmael turned 13, as Rashi explains it? Moreover, the Sages have already agreed that Isaac was born in Nisan; Rashi himself says in his comment to "I will return to you next year" (18:10) that the announcement occurred on Passover, and that Isaac was born exactly a year later, on the next Passover. "That very day" was the very day Abraham was commanded. The text is praising his fear of the Lord, and how eager all his retainers were to hasten and fulfill the commandments. But the verse is not saying that Abraham was circumcised first; Ishmael was first, followed by all his household. See v. 23, after which v. 24 tells us that Abraham too was circumcised. He either circumcised them all himself (in his eagerness to perform the commandment) or hired many circumcisers, whom he supervised. He then circumcised himself. Had he insisted on being first, he might have fallen ill; his life might even (because of his age) been in danger. In either case, he would not have been able to see to their circumcisions.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **24 Abraham was ninety-nine years old**. Stating Abraham's and Ishmael's ages was to teach us that if someone was not circumcised at eight days, it is never too late, not even at the age of 100. May the Holy One circumcise our hearts to fear him! (Bekhor Shor).

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VA-YERA'

וירא

NJPS 18 The LORD appeared to him by the terebinths of Mamre; he was sitting at the entrance of the tent as the day grew

OJPS 18 And the LORD appeared unto him by the terebinths of Mamre, as he sat in the tent door in the heat of the

יח וַיֵּרָ֥א אֵלָ֖יו יְהוָ֑ה בְּאֵלֹנֵ֖י מַמְרֵ֥א
וְה֛וּא יֹשֵׁ֥ב פֶּֽתַח־הָאֹ֖הֶל כְּחֹ֥ם הַיּֽוֹם׃

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ What is the meaning of "the LORD appeared to him" (v. 1)? He did not even speak to him, let alone give him a command. ✦ What possible need is there to tell us that this prophecy took place "by the terebinths of Mamre" and that Abraham "was sitting at the entrance of the tent as the day grew hot"? Why should it matter whether he was sitting, standing, or lying down?

RASHI **18:1 The LORD appeared to him.** Paying a visit to the sick. Said R. Hama b. Hanina: It was the third day after his circumcision, and the Holy One came to ask how he was. **By the terebinths of Mamre.** Since Mamre had advised Abraham to go ahead with the circumcision, **[A]** the Lord appeared to Abraham on Mamre's property. **He was sitting.** The consonants also spell "he sat." Abraham tried to get up, but the Holy One reassured him, "Sit, and I will stand. You will symbolize your descendants, when in the future I stand by to advise the assembly while they sit in judgment. 'God stands in the assembly of the judges' [Ps. 82:1]." **At the entrance of the tent.** To see whether there might be any passersby whom he could invite into his home. **As the day grew hot.** The Holy One took the sun out

[A] According to Jewish tradition Abraham consulted his "allies" (14:13) about this.

KIMHI **18:1 The LORD appeared to him.** To tell him about Sodom, since Abraham was the greatest man of that generation. He wanted everyone to know that He paid attention to the lower world, to reward people or punish them in accordance with their deeds. Abraham, of course, knew this through his own intellect, but God wanted to make sure he would teach it to those who came after him. **By the terebinths of Mamre.** He was still dwelling where he had been previously. As we are told in 14:13, he was among "allies"

RASHBAM **18:1 The LORD appeared to him.** How so? By means of three "men" who were angels coming to him. There are many places where an angel is identified as if it were the Shekhinah, like the angel of whom we are told, "My Name is in him" (Exod. 23:21). God's representative stands in for God Himself. For example, in Exod. 3:2, "an angel of the LORD" appeared to Moses, after which "the LORD saw that he had turned aside to look" (Exod. 3:4). **As the day grew hot.** Was it necessary to write this? Yes, to prepare us for the next episode,

IBN EZRA **18:1 The LORD appeared to him.** There are a few who say that the Lord is the "three men" of v. 2—He is one and He is three, inseparable. But they have forgotten that later "the *two* angels arrived in Sodom" (19:1). Other commentators say that the Lord appeared to him in a prophetic vision, after which he "looked up" and saw three angels, one to give them the news about Sarah and the other two on their way to Sodom, one to destroy and the other to save Lot. Some commentators say that the three men were prophets. You might ask, How can a prophet prophesy to a prophet (for Abraham was a prophet too) unless he

NAHMANIDES **18:1 The LORD appeared to him.** See Rashi's comments on this episode. Maimonides, in the *Guide*, explains the text as a case of a general statement followed by specifics. First we are told that "the Lord appeared to him" in prophetic visions; then we learn how this vision occurred: "he saw three men" (v. 2) and so forth. But, if all he saw in the vision was three men eating lunch, how can it say that "the LORD appeared to him"? The Lord neither appeared in the vision nor in his mind. There is certainly no other prophecy in the Bible matching what Maimonides describes. According to him, Sarah did not make cakes, Abraham did not prepare a calf, Sarah did not even laugh—it was all a vision. But if that is so, then this is no different than a regular, meaningless dream. What would be the point of causing him to see all this? He says the same about Jacob's wrestling match, which makes it hard to understand why Jacob was "limping on his hip" (32:32) after he woke up, or why he said, "I have seen a divine being face to face, yet my life has been preserved" (32:31). Prophets are not afraid they will die because they have seen prophetic visions. Jacob certainly would not be; he had seen the Holy One many times in prophetic visions. If we follow this opinion of Maimonides, the whole story about Lot and the angels would also have to be a prophetic vision—and even if we permit Lot to rise to the level of prophet, can we imagine that the wicked sinners of Sodom were prophets too? And of course if the whole thing was a vision, at the end of it Lot would have still been in Sodom. But Maimonides thinks that all the events actually happened, but that the words that were spoken were spoken in a vision. But these ideas contradict Scripture. It is forbidden even to listen to them, let alone to believe them. It is true that whenever the text says that someone saw an angel, or that an angel spoke, that did take place in a vision or a dream, for human senses cannot apprehend the angels. But these are not *prophetic* dreams. Just seeing an angel, or hearing one speak, does not make a person a prophet. Maimonides declares that every prophet except for Moses had his prophecy mediated by an angel, but that is not so. B. Meg. 3a states definitively that Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi were superior to Daniel because they were prophets and he was not. That is why his book was not included among the prophets, even though he saw and spoke with the angel Gabriel (see Daniel 9–10). Was Hagar the Egyptian a prophetess? Exod. 6:3 tells us clearly the distinction between the prophecy of Moses and that of the Patriarchs: "I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as El Shaddai, but I did not make Myself known to them by My name." El Shaddai is certainly one of the holy names of the Creator. It is not the name of an angel. Rabbinic literature also describes the distinction between the Patriarchs' prophecy and that of Moses without ever saying that the Patriarchs got their prophecies from an angel. **[A]** As for the Binding of Isaac, it is standard for a command to be given prophetically but cancelled by an angel. A prophet would know that that was God's word as well. Again, those who see and speak with angels are *not* necessarily prophets. They are having visions, their eyes are "opened." When the text calls angels "men" (as it does in our story or that of Lot or of Jacob wrestling), our Sages take it to refer to a "presence" created for these angels—a "garment," as it is called among the knowledgeable—which those souls who

[A] We omit Nahmanides' discussion of the prophet and the man of God in 1 Kings 13 and of Balaam (see his comments to that story, especially to Num. 24:4).

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **18:1 The LORD appeared to him by the terebinths of Mamre.** In v. 17. What follows explains the situation in which the Lord appeared to him: after the three men came to him—not, as people think, *before* they came (Bekhor Shor). The idea that He was visiting Abraham while he recovered from the circumcision derives from the fact that nowhere else do we find the Holy One "appearing" without speaking (Hizkuni). **By the terebinths of Mamre.** How is it possible (as Rashi suggests) that a man like Abraham would consult with his friends about whether to fulfill the commandment of circumcision? He was trying to size them up, and found none of them in the right but Mamre (Hizkuni). **He was sitting at the entrance of the tent as the day grew hot.** Between 11:00

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NJPS hot. [2]Looking up, he saw three men standing near him. As soon as he saw them, he ran from the entrance of the tent to greet them and,

OJPS day; [2]and he lifted up his eyes and looked, and, lo, three men stood over against him; and when he saw them, he ran to meet them from the

2 וַיִּשָּׂא עֵינָיו וַיַּרְא וְהִנֵּה שְׁלֹשָׁה אֲנָשִׁים
נִצָּבִים עָלָיו וַיַּרְא וַיָּרָץ לִקְרָאתָם מִפֶּתַח

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why must v. 2 tell us twice—as the Hebrew does—that Abraham "saw" three men? ✦ If the men were standing still, why did Abraham have to run?

RASHI of its case so Abraham would not be bothered with guests. But seeing that Abraham was suffering from the lack of guests, He brought the angels to him in the guise of men.

2 Looking up, he saw three men. One to bring the news about Sarah, one to annihilate Sodom, and one to heal Abraham. For a single angel cannot perform two assignments. As you see, throughout the passage they are referred to in the plural. Yet for the news about Sarah it says, "*I* will return to you" (v. 10), and with regard to Sodom it says, "*I* cannot do anything" (19:22). Raphael, who healed Abraham, then went off to rescue Lot: "When *they* had brought them outside, *one* said, 'Flee for your life!'" (19:17). You learn that one angel had the task of saving him. **Standing near him.** More precisely, "over against" him (OJPS). They were standing before him but (since they were angels) the text found a more polite way to say that. **As soon as he saw them.** The Hebrew text here simply repeats "he saw" from the beginning of the verse. The first does mean that he caught sight of them, but this one implies that he "saw" (that is, understood) that they did

RASHBAM when "the two angels arrived in Sodom in the evening" (19:1). That is why Lot invited them to spend the night. But they came to Abraham at midday, when it is not the custom for visitors to stay, but to eat and travel on. So Abraham did not invite them to spend the night, merely to "refresh yourselves; then go on" (v. 5).

IBN EZRA were greater in prophecy? (This is how Moses could prophesy to Aaron.) But of course they did not come to prophesy to Abraham, but to Sarah. That is why they asked, "Where is your wife Sarah?" (v. 9). We find a prophet described as an angel (which in Hebrew is simply "a messenger" of the Lord) in Hag. 1:13, "Haggai, the LORD's *messenger*, fulfilling the LORD's *mission*." As for what I myself think, you will find some hints about it in my comment to Exod. 3:15.

2 Looking up. Some commentators remind us that there is no "before and after" in the Torah; according to this understanding, "the LORD appeared to him" (v. 1) *after* he had looked up and seen the three men and done this and that. Only then is the Lord's appearance to Abraham described, starting in v. 17.

KIMHI there, and as Solomon wrote, "A close neighbor is better than a distant brother" (Prov. 27:10). **As the day grew hot.** Abraham was dozing in the heat when he saw this vision.

2 Standing near him. The Hebrew verb implies that they were standing by at his service: "Saul said to the courtiers standing about him" (1 Sam. 22:7); "*presenting* themselves to the Lord of all the earth" (Zech. 6:5). "The LORD was standing beside him" (28:13) does not carry this meaning. **He ran from the entrance of the tent to greet them.** So it appeared to him in his vision. **Bowing to the ground.** Because they seemed

NAHMANIDES merit it (the pious and the prophets) can see with eyes of flesh. I cannot say more than this. I will drop some hints along the way about cases (such as the beginning of Moses' prophecy, and that of Zechariah) where the Lord appears but an angel speaks or an angel appears but the Lord speaks. As for our story, the setting is as follows. Abraham has just been circumcised, and is sitting in the entrance to his tent to keep cool, because the heat outside is debilitating. The point is that he was not doing anything to prepare himself to receive a prophecy, neither prostrating nor praying, and still this vision came to him. **By the terebinths of Mamre.** This tells us where he was circumcised. The appearance of the Shekhinah to him was a reward for circumcising himself, just as (at the inauguration of the Tabernacle) Moses and Aaron came out, blessed the people, "and the Presence of the LORD appeared to all the people" (Lev. 9:23), who had earned a sight of the Shekhinah by their efforts in fulfilling the command to construct the Tabernacle. Neither there nor here did the Shekhinah appear for the purpose of giving a command or any other utterance; it was a reward, a way of saying that the Holy One found their deeds acceptable. The same occurred when "Jacob went on his way, and angels of God encountered him" (32:2). They said nothing to him; he had simply earned an angelic vision as a reward and as a way to tell him that his behavior was appreciated. This is precisely what is happening to Abraham in our story. It happened to the Israelites who went into the sea as well, as we learn from what they sang when they got out on the other side: "This is my God and I will enshrine Him" (Exod. 15:2). As our tradition says, a slave-girl at the sea saw things Ezekiel the prophet never saw, a reward because "they had faith in the LORD and His servant Moses" (Exod. 14:31). Of course, the Shekhinah can also appear to protect His righteous servants, as when "the whole community threatened to pelt [Joshua and Caleb] with stones, and the Presence of the LORD appeared in the Tent of Meeting to all the Israelites" (Num. 14:10). Pay no attention to the separation of the circumcision and this vision into two different weekly readings; the story continues right through, which is why it says that the Lord appeared "to him" rather than "to Abraham." This is what the Sages meant by saying that this appearance was a matter of visiting the sick. It was not for the sake of an utterance (Abraham already knew that he was to have a son by Sarah), but simply to pay respect. Perhaps they also meant that God's presence is a healing one: "The king's smile means life" (Prov. 16:15).

2 Standing near him. Watching him, as when "the servant in charge of the reapers" (Ruth 2:6) is described that way by saying that he was standing "over" them (and see OJPS to our phrase). That is why he had to run and get them, which indicates that they were not moving. He was still sitting in the entrance of the tent after the vision of the divine Presence had departed. But our phrase could mean

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS and noon, the hours when scholars eat, that righteous man would stand at the entrance of his tent to see whether someone might pass by whom he could bring into his home—though it was the hottest time of day (Hizkuni). It was not a settled place; Abraham was trying to soak up some rays of sun to warm him after he had been chilled by losing blood during his circumcision. But in fact it was still quite early in the morning, just when the sun was beginning to grow hot (Abarbanel).

2 Looking up, he saw three men. The straightforward sense is that they were actual human beings. Angels do not eat and drink, or spend the night as these did at Lot's house. Remember what the angel said to Manoah in Judg. 13:16: "If you detain me, I shall not eat your food" (Bekhor Shor). Rashi says it was Raphael who healed Abraham and went to rescue Lot; B. BM 86b says it was Michael, who came to bring the news to Sarah, that went to rescue Lot. But those are two different tasks, and angels do only one thing. Since healing and rescuing are essentially the same, apparently Rashi's reading of the Talmud passage—Raphael instead of Michael—is the correct one (Hizkuni). They were prophets at the Shem and Eber level, but are called men with respect to Abraham because their prophecy was for

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NJPS bowing to the ground, [3]he said, "My lords, if it please you, do not go on past your servant. [4]Let a little water be brought; bathe your feet and recline under

OJPS tent door, and bowed down to the earth, [3]and said: "My lord, if now I have found favor in thy sight, pass not away, I pray thee, from thy servant. [4]Let now a little water be fetched, and wash your feet, and

הָאֹהֶל וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ אָרְצָה׃ [3] וַיֹּאמַר אֲדֹנָי אִם־נָא מָצָאתִי חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ אַל־נָא תַעֲבֹר מֵעַל עַבְדֶּךָ׃ [4] יֻקַּח־נָא מְעַט־מַיִם וְרַחֲצוּ

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why does Abraham suddenly address the three men in the singular as "My lord" (OJPS, and see further the Hebrew of v. 3)—but only here? ✦ Why does Abraham suggest that he will bring just "a little water" (v. 4)? ✦ Why does he tell them to "recline under the tree" rather than inviting them inside?

RASHI not want to disturb him. So he took the initiative and ran toward them. Indeed, B. BM 86b says they originally stood "near" him but decided to leave when they saw him changing his bandages. So he ran after them.

3 My lords, if it please you, do not go on past your servant. He first spoke to all of them: "My lords." Then he addressed himself to their leader; the rest of his words are in the singular in the Hebrew (see OJPS). If their leader did not go past, his comrades would certainly remain also. All this takes "my lords" as a genuine plural. But there is another reading of it: "Lord" in the honorific plural, as in OJPS, addressed to the Holy One, asking him to wait while Abraham ran after the guests. This reading presumes that he said "Lord" before he ran, which for the Bible would be a perfectly normal way of telling the story. See my comment to "let the days allowed him be one hundred and twenty years" (6:3). Genesis Rabbah explains it both ways. **[B]**

4 Let a little water be brought. By an assistant. The Holy One therefore repaid Abraham's descendants by having water brought to them by an assistant: "Moses raised his hand and struck the rock" (Num. 20:10). **Bathe your feet.** He thought they were Arabs, who

[B] Our texts of Genesis Rabbah have only the first of these readings.

IBN EZRA **3 My lords.** If they were prophets, this is quite straightforward. Note that the *pataḥ* vowel under the נ indicates a genuine plural, not the similar-sounding word that uses *qamatz*, which means "Lord" with reference to God. Some manuscripts do have a *qamatz*, **[A]** which here would simply be an honorific plural indicating that the man was a prophet of the Lord. **If it please you.** The "you" is singular. Abraham is addressing the leader of the three men.

4 Bathe your feet and recline under the tree. He switches to the plural to address all three. (Others think he first

[A] As our texts today do.

KIMHI to be great men. But our Sages say that Abraham was such a powerful prophet that seeing angels was no different to him than seeing men.

3 Do not go on past your servant. The rabbinic tradition that he was asking God to wait while he ran after the guests is a way of teaching that hospitality to guests is greater than receiving the divine Presence.

4 Let a little water be brought. "A little," to minimize his generosity; "brought" by a servant, as opposed to the bread of v. 5, which

NAHMANIDES that they were "standing near it," the tent, to the side rather than in front of the entrance. The same preposition is used in Exod. 14:9 to say that the Israelites were camped "by" the sea.

3 My lords, if it please you. In pointed texts, I have found this word with a *qamatz*, indicating that he was calling them by the name of their master: "my Lord." **[B]** For he recognized that they were angels, who can be addressed as "gods" with a small *g*. That is why he bowed down to them. **Do not go on past your servant.** The grammatically singular forms indicate that he was saying this to each of them individually, something we find throughout the Torah. See, e.g., the Hebrew texts of Lev. 19:9 and Deut. 4:29, which switch from plural to singular. In fact, this phenomenon occurs throughout the book of Deuteronomy. (And note Deut. 11:26, where the switch is from singular to plural.) The Sages say he was addressing the leader of the group, which is also possible. But I think he was indeed calling all of them "my lords," and then turning to each of them. To one he said, "please do not go on past," and he then said the same to each of the other two, pleading with each of them individually. This was the polite, respectful thing to do, in accordance with his desire to treat them generously. He realized that they were just passing by and did not wish to stay, so he offered them just "a little water" (v. 4) and "a morsel of bread" (v. 5), "like cold water to a parched throat" (Prov. 25:25). That is why he merely asked them to "recline under the tree" (v. 4), not to come inside the "Tent and Tabernacle" (2 Sam. 7:6).

[B] See Ibn Ezra's comment.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS Sarah, not for him. Nor could they be called angels (as prophets can be) with respect to Abraham, since he had received many prophecies and they just one or two (Gersonides). The idea that they were prophets is an obvious falsehood. There were no other prophets in the world at that time but Abraham—and if there had been they too would have been commanded to circumcise themselves, and the Torah would have told us about it. I would be inclined to accept Nahmanides' idea of the "garment," if only the wise kabbalist could answer me this: If the "garment" refers to actual bodies, then removing the garment would be the same thing as death (which is impossible). But if the garment is some kind of atmospheric manifestation, why (for example) could Balaam's ass see it when Balaam could not? They are impressions that the Holy One directs at the mind—for a prophet, but for others—like Lot and the men of Sodom—only at the senses (Abarbanel). **Standing near him.** The instant after he looked up and saw them at a distance they were standing near him. That is how, though they appeared to be men, Abraham knew they were something more than human (Abarbanel). While he was engaged in the miraculous vision, they were waiting to speak with him (Sforno). **He ran from the entrance of the tent.** He began running right from the entrance, to demonstrate how important they were to him (Sforno).

3 Do not go on past. Rather, "let it [your group, this caravan of righteous men] not go on past" (Bekhor Shor). How did Abraham know which one of them was the leader (as Rashi says he does)? He saw them walking, with the master in the middle and his two disciples, the greater on his right and the lesser on his left (Hizkuni). When he speaks positively, it is always in the plural; it is only when he requests that they *not* do something that he must speak in the singular, to make clear that he means to include each of them. Otherwise, they might assume that he meant the group should stay even if any of them individually wanted to "go on past." This is just common sense (Abarbanel).

4 Let a little water be brought; bathe your feet. The water was not just for cleaning; weary travelers find it refreshing (Bekhor Shor). It was the time of the sirocco, when the full power of the sun is unleashed, and their legs were sweaty (Hizkuni). A "little" water

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NJPS the tree. [5]And let me fetch a morsel of bread that you may refresh yourselves; then go on—seeing that you have come your servant's way." They replied, "Do as you have said."

[6]Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah, and said, "Quick, three seahs of

רַגְלֵיכֶם וְהִשָּׁעֲנוּ תַּחַת הָעֵץ׃ 5 וְאֶקְחָה
פַּת־לֶחֶם וְסַעֲדוּ לִבְּכֶם אַחַר תַּעֲבֹרוּ
כִּי־עַל־כֵּן עֲבַרְתֶּם עַל־עַבְדְּכֶם וַיֹּאמְרוּ כֵּן
תַּעֲשֶׂה כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתָּ׃
6 וַיְמַהֵר אַבְרָהָם הָאֹהֱלָה אֶל־שָׂרָה
וַיֹּאמֶר מַהֲרִי שְׁלֹשׁ סְאִים קֶמַח סֹלֶת

OJPS recline yourselves under the tree. [5]And I will fetch a morsel of bread, and stay ye your heart; after that ye shall pass on; forasmuch as ye are come to your servant." And they said: "So do, as thou hast said."

[6]And Abraham hastened into the tent unto Sarah, and said: "Make ready quickly three measures of fine meal, knead it, and

RASHI worshiped the dust at their feet, and was trying to take care not to have them bring idolatry into his home. Note that Lot, who was careless about this, mentions spending the night first: "Please, my lords, turn aside to your servant's house to spend the night, and bathe your feet" (19:2).

5 And let me fetch a morsel of bread that you may refresh yourselves. In Torah, Prophets, and Writings alike, we find bread "staying" (OJPS) or "refreshing" the heart, as the Hebrew idiom here has it. In the Torah, it is in our verse; in the Prophets, "Stay your heart with a morsel of bread" (Judg. 19:5); in the Writings, "and bread that stays man's heart" (Ps. 104:15). Said R. Hama: "Heart" is not written here as *levav*, with two בs, but as *lev*, with one, showing that the evil inclination has no power over angels; they have only the one inclination (see Genesis Rabbah). **Then go on.** More literally, "go on past" (compare OJPS). **Seeing that you have come your servant's way.** Though *al ken* means "therefore" in Biblical Hebrew, the idiom in our verse, *ki al ken*, always means "inasmuch as": "inasmuch as I did not give her to my son Shelah" (38:26); "inasmuch as you know where we should camp" (Num. 10:31). See also 19:8 and 33:10. **Do as you have said.** Contrast their reply to Lot (19:2).

6 Choice flour. Rather, "flour, choice flour." Choice flour for the cakes, and regular flour to be used (as cooks do) to dust the surface of the boiling pot to absorb the scum.

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Isn't it insulting for Abraham to offer them a meal and say to them—as the Hebrew of v. 5 really says, despite Rashi—"*That is why* you have come your servant's way"? ✦ Why does Abraham make such a fuss about these three travelers? ✦ Why does he serve them himself, when he has a staff of 318 men (not to mention women and children) at his beck and call? Don't forget that he is 100 years old and has just been circumcised! ✦ Why does he prepare such a vast amount of food—"three seahs" of flour (v. 6) and an entire calf (v. 7)—for just three men?

RASHBAM **5 Seeing that.** The same expression is used in 19:8; see "forasmuch as" of OJPS (matching "since" in NJPS there) to note the resemblance. The Hebrew idiom actually omits "that," as also occurs in many other places.

6 Choice flour. Wheat flour, as the Hebrew word used here always indicates. That is derived by the Sages from the explicit mention in Exod. 29:2 that "choice wheat flour" is to be used for consecrating the priests.

IBN EZRA addressed "the Lord" and then got the permission of the Shekhinah to address all three.)

5 Seeing that. Or simply "since" (compare 19:8). **Do as you have said.** It was proper behavior to acknowledge that "a morsel of bread" would be enough.

6 Knead! 1 Sam. 28:24 describes the process in slightly more detail: "she . . . took flour and kneaded it, and baked some unleavened cakes."

KIMHI he himself would fetch. **Bathe your feet.** The verb is imperative, but he meant that a servant would do it for them. **Recline under the tree.** In the shade.

5 And let me fetch a morsel of bread that you may refresh yourselves. "Bread *sustains* man's life" (Ps. 104:15); "sustain" of the psalm is the same Hebrew verb as "refresh" of our verse. **Then go on.** That is, if you wish to go on, do so only after you have eaten. **Do as you have said.** Fetch a morsel of bread, but do not go to any more trouble than that.

6 Quick, three seahs of choice flour! Knead and make cakes! The finer the flour and the thinner the cakes, the faster they would bake.

NAHMANIDES **5 Seeing that you have come your servant's way.** Since your journey has brought you to me, it is only right for you to rest a bit at my home. **Do as you have said.** See Ibn Ezra's comment. Or perhaps what they meant was, "Yes, just let us recline under the tree and then go right on, for we are on assignment. Do not delay us by inviting us in, let alone by asking us to spend the night."

6 Three seahs of choice flour. See Rashi's comment, which comes from Genesis Rabbah. There they explain this to mean three seahs each. We do not know why he would have had to make so much bread for three people. Perhaps he understood that they were not really eating the bread but making it vanish miraculously, in which case serving them extra bread would be like piling more offerings onto the altar. Or perhaps he also feasted the most important members of his household along with them, as a sign of respect. But the straightforward sense of the text is that he is telling her to take three seahs of regular flour, from which she would have sifted a somewhat smaller quantity of choice flour.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS because it was still quite early and they had not walked far yet (Abarbanel). **And recline under the tree.** They could not rest in the tent, which was full of the men who were recovering from being circumcised. That is why Abraham had to take care of everything himself (Abarbanel).

5 Then go on—seeing that you have come your servant's way. You obviously have come here for a meal; travelers do not fast, and it is lunchtime. But I see that you are too shy to ask (Hizkuni). Rather, "then go on—for that is why you have come your servant's way." He acknowledged that it was a time to keep walking, not yet time to eat (Abarbanel). **Do as you have said.** That is, behave regularly in accordance with what you have just said; this I learned from R. Obadiah (may that righteous man's memory be a blessing). But we understand them to be agreeing that he should do what he suggested (Bekhor Shor). Another reading: May you always [have the wherewithal to] do as you have said, forever (Hizkuni).

6 Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah. Old as she was, Abraham wanted Sarah to prepare it—either out of respect for them, or to make sure it was done in purity, and as quickly as possible (Abarbanel). **Quick!** They had to get to Sodom that same day (Hizkuni). **Three seahs of choice flour.** Three seahs of flour would yield three-tenths of a measure of choice flour, one-tenth for each. But others say he had a three-seah oven; as the rabbinic saying has it, "Bread bakes best when the oven is full" (Hizkuni).

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NJPS choice flour! Knead and make cakes!" 7Then Abraham ran to the herd, took a calf, tender and choice, and gave it to a servant-boy, who hastened to prepare it. 8He took curds and milk and the calf that had been prepared and set these before them; and he waited on them under the tree as they ate.

9They said to him, "Where is your wife Sarah?" And he replied, "There, in the

לְוּשִׁי וַעֲשִׂי עֻגוֹת׃ 7 וְאֶל־הַבָּקָר רָץ
אַבְרָהָם וַיִּקַּח בֶּן־בָּקָר רַךְ וְטוֹב וַיִּתֵּן
אֶל־הַנַּעַר וַיְמַהֵר לַעֲשׂוֹת אֹתוֹ׃ 8 וַיִּקַּח
חֶמְאָה וְחָלָב וּבֶן־הַבָּקָר אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה וַיִּתֵּן
לִפְנֵיהֶם וְהוּא־עֹמֵד עֲלֵיהֶם תַּחַת הָעֵץ
וַיֹּאכֵלוּ׃
9 וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵלָיו* אַיֵּה שָׂרָה אִשְׁתֶּךָ וַיֹּאמֶר

ט. 9. נקוד על א׳ ו׳ ו׳, ולפי נוסחים מקובלים אין נקוד על ל׳

RASHI **7 A calf, tender and choice.** Just as there were three cakes, so too there were three calves, in order to feed each of them calf's tongue with mustard. **And gave it to a servant-boy.** The boy he gave it to was Ishmael, in order to train him to fulfill the commandments.

8 He took curds and milk. Not "curds" but the "cream" that is skimmed off the top of the milk. He did not bring them the bread, for Sarah had begun menstruating again. Her period returned that very day, and the dough was rendered ritually unclean. **And the calf that had been prepared.** Each calf, as it was ready. **They ate.** They appeared to eat. We learn from this that one should follow the local custom.

9 They said to him. The dotted letters of "to him" spell "where is he?" We learn that one should ask one's host about his wife and one's hostess about her husband. The angels also asked Sarah about her husband. **Where is your wife Sarah?** They wanted Abraham to know they were impressed with Sarah's modesty. Said R. Yose b. Hanina: They wanted to offer her the rest of the wine used for the Grace after Meals. (See B. BM 87a.) **There, in the tent.** Once again emphasizing her modesty.

IBN EZRA **8 They ate.** At least, the food was "eaten," that is, consumed, as when "the fire has *consumed* the burnt offering on the altar" (Lev. 6:3). If they were prophets, then of course "they ate" should be understood literally.

KIMHI **7 Tender and choice.** As it ought to be. This story is written to let us learn from Abraham's example how to treat guests. **A servant-boy.** The Hebrew says merely "the boy"; according to the midrash, this was Ishmael.

8 He took curds and milk and the calf that had been prepared and set these before them. So that they might eat anything they liked, or everything. The bread is not mentioned because he had brought that first, as indeed he would even for the least of guests. Wine is also not mentioned. **He waited on them.** Literally, "he stood by them" (OJPS) just as they had been "standing near him," using the same preposition that is used in v. 2 (though with a different verb). **They ate.** Or so it appeared to him in his vision.

9 To him. There is no explanation for the dots over the first, third, and fourth letters of the Hebrew word other than those given in the midrash. **[A] Where is your wife Sarah?** Out of modesty, she was not with them where they were eating, which (as we learn here) is the proper behavior for modest women. But they had news to give her.

[A] See Rashi's comment.

NAHMANIDES **7 Then Abraham ran to the herd.** This tells us how eager he was to seize this opportunity to offer hospitality. Though he was rich enough to have 318 warriors at his command and was elderly and recovering from circumcision, he nonetheless went to Sarah's tent himself and then ran to the herd to select the best animal for his guests. He did this personally and did not have it done by any of his many servants.

8 They ate. Tradition says they made the food vanish. You can learn more about this from the story of Manoah in Judges 13 if you are capable of doing so.

OJPS make cakes." 7And Abraham ran unto the herd, and fetched a calf tender and good, and gave it unto the servant; and he hastened to dress it. 8And he took curd, and milk, and the calf which he had dressed, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree, and they did eat.

9And they said unto him: "Where is Sarah thy wife?" And he said: "Behold, in

RASHBAM **7 Abraham ran to the herd.** Since he had mentioned just "a morsel of bread" (v. 5)—for they were in a hurry to get back on the road—he had to run and make haste if he wanted to fulfill the rabbinic maxim to "say little and do much." All this was written to underscore Abraham's thoughtfulness.

8 He took curds and milk. There was no need to mention that he served them the "morsel of bread" he had explicitly promised them. It was only necessary to say something about the additional things, which he had not mentioned. That is the straightforward way to understand the text. There is nothing new or unusual about serving bread for a meal. But curds and milk and meat, which are by no means served to every guest, had to be specified. **He waited on them.** Literally, "he stood over them" (compare OJPS). When one person is sitting and another is standing, he is said to be standing "over" the other: "I beheld my Lord seated on a high and lofty throne, and seraphs *stood* [in attendance] *on* Him" (Isa. 6:1–2); "I saw the LORD seated upon His throne, with all the host of heaven *standing* [in attendance] *on* Him to the right and to the left" (1 Kings 22:19). **Under the tree.** That is, under the trees of the grove Abraham had planted.

9 Where is your wife Sarah? They asked even though they knew. We find the same phenomenon with the Shekhinah elsewhere, as when "the LORD God called out to the man and said to him, 'Where are you?'" (3:9), or when "God came to Balaam and said, 'What do these people want of you?'" (Num. 22:9). Isaiah, too, when Merodach-baladan **[A]** sent envoys to Hezekiah, did not need to inquire, "What did those men say to you? Where have they come to you from?" (2 Kings 20:14, Isa. 39:3). All such questions are conversation starters.

[A] Our text of Rashbam says "Evil-merodach," but this is a mistake.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **7 A calf, tender and choice.** A tender young calf would cook the fastest. As for the midrash that he fed them tongue, the point is that they would not have to wait for the calf to be flayed (Hizkuni). "Tender and good" (OJPS)—"good" in the sense of "fat" (Gersonides). **A servant-boy, who hastened to prepare it.** Ishmael too hurried to welcome the guests (Abarbanel).

8 He took curds and milk and the calf that had been prepared. First the curds and milk and afterward the calf; Abraham was an observer of the commandments (Bekhor Shor). Though it is not proof, this verse is used to remind us that one may eat meat shortly after dairy but not vice versa (Hizkuni). It is proper to serve kings and other great men more than they will be able to eat (Abarbanel).

9 To him. This is one of 10 places in the Torah with dotted letters (Masorah). The dots indicate that the word is partially written and partially erased. They originally intended to give this news to Sarah alone, not to Abraham, but they found no one else to ask where she was (Gersonides). **There, in the tent.** She has no son to accompany her in public (Abarbanel).

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NJPS tent." [10]Then one said, "I will return to you next year, and your wife Sarah shall have a son!" Sarah was listening at the entrance of the tent, which was behind him. [11]Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in years; Sarah had stopped having the periods of women. [12]And Sarah laughed to herself, saying, "Now that I am withered, am I to have enjoyment—with

OJPS the tent." [10]And He said: "I will certainly return unto thee when the season cometh round; and, lo, Sarah thy wife shall have a son." And Sarah heard in the tent door, which was behind him.— [11]Now Abraham and Sarah were old, and well stricken in age; it had ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women.— [12]And Sarah laughed within herself, saying: "After I am waxed old shall I have pleasure, my

הִנֵּה בָאֹהֶל׃ [10] וַיֹּאמֶר שׁוֹב אָשׁוּב אֵלֶיךָ כָּעֵת חַיָּה וְהִנֵּה־בֵן לְשָׂרָה אִשְׁתֶּךָ וְשָׂרָה שֹׁמַעַת פֶּתַח הָאֹהֶל וְהִוא אַחֲרָיו׃ [11] וְאַבְרָהָם וְשָׂרָה זְקֵנִים בָּאִים בַּיָּמִים חָדַל לִהְיוֹת לְשָׂרָה אֹרַח כַּנָּשִׁים׃ [12] וַתִּצְחַק שָׂרָה בְּקִרְבָּהּ לֵאמֹר אַחֲרֵי בְלֹתִי הָיְתָה־לִּי עֶדְנָה וַאדֹנִי זָקֵן׃

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why must Abraham be given the news that "I will return to you next year, and your wife Sarah shall have a son" (v. 10) a second time, having already been told exactly this in 17:21?

RASHI **10 I will return to you.** The angel did not mean that he himself would return; he said this in the voice of the Holy One, just as the angel promised Hagar in 16:10, "I will greatly increase your offspring," which of course the angel himself could not do except as an agent of the Holy One. Elisha, who also promised a woman that she would have a child "next year" (2 Kings 4:16), could not say, "I will return." For he was a human being, not an angel. **Next year.** Literally, "like this [same] living time," in which you are all living and healthy—exactly a year from now. It was the first day of Passover, the 15th of Nisan, and Isaac was born on that day of Passover in the following year. **Which was behind him.** The entrance was behind him.

11 Sarah had stopped having the periods of women. NJPS translates idiomatically, OJPS more literally.

12 Sarah laughed to herself. But the Hebrew can be read to say that Sarah laughed

RASHBAM **10 Next year.** More literally, at "the season" (OJPS) "of bringing to life"—when she is brought to term. Compare "at the season when she who is to bear has borne" (Mic. 5:2). What the midwives said to Pharaoh is closely related as well: "Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women: they are *vigorous* [literally, "they bring to life"]. Before the midwife can come to them, they have given birth" (Exod. 1:19). In rabbinic literature too one who gives birth is referred to as "bringing to life." **Which was behind him.** The Hebrew merely says "he/it was behind him/it," but the translations are correct: the entrance to Sarah's tent was behind the angel, which is why she could listen to their conversation.

12 Enjoyment. Rather, "rejuvenation" of the flesh, smoothing out of wrinkles (see B. Men. 86a).

KIMHI **10 I will return to you next year, and your wife Sarah shall have a son!** Abraham already knew this; but saying it again would reassure him that it would happen, besides giving Sarah the opportunity to hear it directly from the angel's mouth. **Sarah was listening at the entrance of the tent, which was behind him.** She had been inside the tent, but came to the entrance when she realized that they were talking about her. The angels could not see her because their backs were to the tent, which was therefore "behind him," behind the angel who was speaking.

11 The periods of women. Literally, "after the manner of women" (OJPS). Rachel uses a similar expression: "the manner of women is upon me" (31:35). Due to the dryness of old age, the blood from which the embryo is created ceases; no blood, no child.

12 Sarah laughed to herself. She thought he was a prophet, not realizing he was an angel. **Saying.** "Saying" it in her heart, not out loud.

IBN EZRA **10 Next year.** The Hebrew is terse: "At the season—life!" At this time next year, there will be a message of life for Sarah, as in "Say as follows: 'To life!'" (1 Sam. 25:6). "Life" corresponds with "Sarah," not "season." **Which was behind him.** Rather, "he [the angel who was speaking with Abraham] was behind it [the tent]," that is, on the other side of it—outside it. Abraham was sitting in the entrance of the tent, so the angel could not see Sarah. But others understand our verse to say that "the entrance of the tent was behind it"—the entrance of Sarah's tent was behind the tent of Abraham.

11 Advanced in years. Literally, they were "coming along in years." They had reached old age.

12 Sarah laughed to herself. But the Holy One revealed her secret to the angel. **Now that I am withered.** Can I once again

NAHMANIDES **10 I will return to you.** Rashi was forced to understand this as he did because in v. 14 the Lord says, "I will return to you." But we do not find either the angel or the Holy One returning at that time. Perhaps that return is to be understood from the words of 21:1. Ibn Ezra thinks the angel is speaking vv. 13–14 as well and says in his comment to 21:2 that the angel did return (though this is not written explicitly). In my view, "return" here is connected with the expression "at the *turn* of the year" (2 Sam. 11:1): "I will restore to you another time at which you will all be alive, and Sarah will have a son." And that time will be "at this season next year" (17:21). "Return" in our verse has a transitive meaning, as in "the LORD your God will *restore* your fortunes and take you back in love" (Deut. 30:3).

11 Advanced in years. Literally, "in days." A young man is called "standing in days," and the days are called his own as if they belonged to him: "I will let you enjoy the full count of *your* days" (Exod. 23:26). But when he gets old and lives for many days longer than most people of his generation, he is called "advancing" in days, since he is like someone who is moving toward another country, traveling from one city to another. Each day is a journey. **Sarah had stopped having the periods of women.** Which is the time for pregnancy. After her period has stopped due to her age, she can no longer conceive.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **10 I will return to you.** Since you do not want me to give the news to Sarah, I will tell it to you (Abarbanel). I will return to you on the anniversary of your circumcision (Sforno). **Next year.** Rather, "like living time." For the past and future do not exist; in nature, only the present moment is alive. When the present moment would reach one year later, Sarah would have a son (Gersonides). **Which was behind him.** Rather, as the Jerusalem Targum puts it, "he was behind him"—Ishmael was behind the angel because Sarah, thinking they were human men, did not want to be secluded with them (Hizkuni). Rather, "which was behind it"—the entrance to Sarah's tent was in the back, not the front, to afford her privacy from passersby (Gersonides).

11 Old, advanced in years. "Old" marks the beginning of old age; "advanced in years" means that they were well along into old age (Abarbanel).

12 Sarah laughed to herself. When Tishrei came, with only six months until Passover, and she saw that she was not pregnant, she

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NJPS my husband so old?" 13Then the LORD said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, saying, 'Shall I in truth bear a child, old as I am?' 14Is anything too wondrous for the LORD? I will return to you at the same season next year, and Sarah shall have a son." 15Sarah lied, saying, "I did not laugh," for she was frightened. But He replied, "You did laugh."

13 וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־אַבְרָהָם לָמָּה זֶּה
צָחֲקָה שָׂרָה לֵאמֹר הַאַף אֻמְנָם אֵלֵד וַאֲנִי
זָקַנְתִּי: 14 הֲיִפָּלֵא מֵיְהוָה דָּבָר לַמּוֹעֵד
אָשׁוּב אֵלֶיךָ כָּעֵת חַיָּה וּלְשָׂרָה בֵּן:
15 וַתְּכַחֵשׁ שָׂרָה | לֵאמֹר לֹא צָחַקְתִּי כִּי | עמ
יָרֵאָה וַיֹּאמֶר | לֹא כִּי צָחָקְתְּ:

OJPS lord being old also?" 13And the LORD said unto Abraham: "Wherefore did Sarah laugh, saying: Shall I of a surety bear a child, who am old? 14Is any thing too hard for the LORD? At the set time I will return unto thee, when the season cometh round, and Sarah shall have a son." 15Then Sarah denied, saying: "I laughed not"; for she was afraid. And He said: "Nay; but thou didst laugh."

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why does the Lord reprove Sarah (in v. 13) for laughing, when He did not reprove Abraham, who in 17:17 also had laughed? (The distinction Nahmanides makes between the two laughs is a joke. They were exactly the same.) ✦ Why was this reproof issued through Abraham and not to Sarah directly? ✦ How could Sarah dare to lie and say, "I did not laugh" (v. 15)?

RASHI "at her insides": "Can this womb support a child? Can these withered breasts give milk?" See the Tanhuma. **Enjoyment**. Rather, as this root is used in rabbinic Hebrew, "softening" (of the skin). Another reading: "recurrence" (that is, of her period). This meaning is also found in rabbinic Hebrew.

13 Shall I in truth bear a child, old as I am? What she actually said was, "with my husband so old" (v. 12). The text changed it for the sake of peace in the family.

14 Is anything too wondrous for the LORD? Rather, as Onkelos translates it, "Is anything concealed from the Lord?" Is there anything blocked from Me, anything I cannot perform according to My will? **At the time**. At the same "set time" (OJPS) that I announced to you yesterday. (See 17:21.)

15 You did laugh. Literally, "no, but you did laugh" (compare OJPS). As our Sages point out, *ki* is used in four different ways: if, perhaps, for (as earlier in our verse), and "but

RASHBAM **13 Then the LORD said.** That is, the chief of the angels. **Old as I am?** This refers to her comment in v. 12, "now that I am withered."

14 Is anything too wondrous for the LORD? Who sent us to you. Similarly, "the LORD rained upon Sodom and Gomorrah sulfurous fire from the LORD out of heaven" (19:24)—the first "Lord" in the verse refers to Gabriel, the second to the Holy One. That is how the midrash explains it. **[B]**

15 You did laugh. More precisely, "No, but you did laugh" (compare OJPS). When the word *ki* follows *lo* ("no, not"), it almost

[B] See Rashbam's comment to 19:24.

KIMHI **13 Then the LORD said.** The angel, called here by his master's name, knew that Sarah had laughed and told Abram. **Shall I in truth bear a child?** This is not precisely what Sarah thought, but remember that in such cases the text preserves the ideas, not the exact words. **Old as I am.** Not saying "with my husband so old" (v. 12), which points to the fact that giving birth at Sarah's age and in her condition would be a far greater miracle.

14 Is anything too wondrous for the LORD? Such things are wondrous to people, who have no idea how they can be done, but not to the Lord, who can change nature at will.

IBN EZRA have pleasure as I did in my youth? **Am I to have enjoyment?** More precisely, "would I have enjoyment?" A past tense verb is used with a future sense. As for "enjoyment," the word is related to "Eden" and indicates great pleasure: "they *luxuriated* in Your great bounty" (Neh. 9:25).

13 In truth. The final *mem* is an adverbial suffix. **Old as I am.** She did indeed say this, with her remark, "Now that I am withered" (v. 12), so the angel spoke the truth.

14 Is anything too wondrous for the LORD? Is anything impossible for Him? "Working wonders" (Exod. 15:11) similarly really means "doing the impossible." Others take our phrase to mean "Is this at all wondrous to the Lord?" But the preposition makes it "too wondrous for," not "wondrous to."

NAHMANIDES **13 Old as I am.** Since she had said, "Now that I am withered" (v. 12), the Lord is speaking the truth. But in order to keep peace between husband and wife, He did not want to add that she had said, "with my husband so old." Otherwise He would have quoted her as saying, "old as my husband and I are." For Sarah was laughing at both of them.

14 Is anything too wondrous for the LORD? Literally, "wondrous *from* the Lord." Is there anything so amazing, so implausible, that such a thing could not come from the Lord? Compare "all is *from* You, and it is Your gift that we have given to You" (1 Chron. 29:14). A similar expression is used in "Asher's bread shall be rich" (49:20), which literally says, "From Asher, his bread is rich." But Onkelos takes our phrase to mean "Is anything hidden from the Lord?" If that is correct, there is a hidden mystery behind these words. **[C]** Rashi's comment really combines both possibilities.

15 Sarah lied. I am astounded that this righteous prophetess would deny something that the Holy One said to Abraham and that she could disbelieve the words of divine angels. Apparently these angels who looked like men came to Abraham, who was wise enough to

[C] Nahmanides is referring to the mystical meanings of the various divine names.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS laughed (Hizkuni). **Now that I am withered, am I to have enjoyment?** This cannot refer to going back to having her period, which is torturous, not enjoyable. She is talking about sex, and the verbs are past tense: "Since I have been withered, have I had enjoyment?"—No. And if we do not have sex, how can I give birth? (Abarbanel). **With my husband so old.** Even if I were a girl, my husband is old (Bekhor Shor).

13 Why did Sarah laugh? Why did the Holy One not reprove Abraham for laughing, in 17:17? He did. Like the wise woman in the story, who lectured her daughter-in-law by giving the lecture to her daughter in the daughter-in-law's hearing, the Holy One reproves Abraham here obliquely so as not to embarrass him (Hizkuni). **Old as I am.** It would not have been polite to tell Abraham that Sarah had said "with my husband so old" (v. 12); that would just have gotten him angry (Bekhor Shor).

14 Is anything too wondrous for the LORD? Rather, "can anything from the Lord be wondered at?" Everyone knows that He can do whatever He wants (Bekhor Shor). Is anything too impossible for the Lord, even hearing that Sarah laughed to herself? (Hizkuni). **I will return to you at the time next year.** Rather, "I will return to you at the time the angel specified—six months from now, on Passover." The numerical value of "at the time" is the same as the value of "on Passover" (Hizkuni).

15 Sarah lied . . . for she was frightened. We learn that Sarah was a truthful person; her lie here can be explained only by her fear (Bekhor Shor). From this we derive that women cannot give testimony, since they sometimes lie out of fear (Hizkuni). **But He replied,**

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NJPS [16]The men set out from there and looked down toward Sodom, Abraham walking with them to see them off. [17]Now the LORD had said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, [18]since Abraham is to become a great and populous nation and all the nations of the earth are to bless themselves by

OJPS [16]And the men rose up from thence, and looked out toward Sodom; and Abraham went with them to bring them on the way. [17]And the LORD said: "Shall I hide from Abraham that which I am doing; [18]seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall

16 וַיָּקֻמוּ מִשָּׁם הָאֲנָשִׁים וַיַּשְׁקִפוּ עַל־פְּנֵי
סְדֹם וְאַבְרָהָם הֹלֵךְ עִמָּם לְשַׁלְּחָם׃
17 וַיהוָה אָמָר הַמְכַסֶּה אֲנִי מֵאַבְרָהָם
אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי עֹשֶׂה׃ 18 וְאַבְרָהָם הָיוֹ יִהְיֶה
לְגוֹי גָּדוֹל וְעָצוּם וְנִבְרְכוּ בוֹ כֹּל גּוֹיֵי

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why did the Lord ask, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do?" (v. 17)? He did not ask whether He should tell Noah about the Flood, but just went ahead and did it.

RASHI rather," as here. He is saying, "It is not as you say. Rather, you did laugh."

16 And looked down toward Sodom. The Hebrew verb always has a negative connotation, except in Deut. 26:15, "Look down from Your holy abode, from heaven," where it is spoken by someone who has given a tenth of his yield "to the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow" (Deut. 26:12). Giving to the poor has such power that it turns fury into fondness. **To see them off.** Since he took them for guests of his.

17 Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do? It would not be nice for Me to do what I am about to do to Sodom without his knowing. I gave him this land, and these five cities are his: "Canaanite territory extended from Sidon as far as Gerar, near Gaza, and as far as Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboiim" (10:19). I named him "father of a multitude of nations" (17:4–5)—can I destroy the children and not tell the father, who is My friend?

18 Abraham is to become a great and populous nation. As a midrash puts it, "the name of the righteous is invoked in blessing" (Prov. 10:7). Since He mentioned him, He

KIMHI **16 Abraham walking with them to see them off.** The Sages explain that one should accompany guests for about a mile on their way. **[B]**

17 Now the LORD had said. In the same vision, but after showing him the angels.

18 Since Abraham is to become a great and populous nation. And most of the world will be settled by his descendants.

[B] A rabbinic mile (based on the Roman mile) is about a kilometer in length.

NAHMANIDES recognize them, but Sarah, like Manoah's wife, **[D]** did not realize that they were angels. She may not have seen them at all. Sarah was laughing to make fun of the idea, as in "He who is enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord mocks at them" (Ps. 2:4). For one laughs joyfully out loud, not to oneself: "Our *mouths* shall be filled with laughter, our tongues, with songs of joy" (Ps. 126:2). The Holy One was accusing her of thinking what He said was impossible, though she should have believed it, or at least said, "Amen! May the LORD do so!" (Jer. 28:6). It was Abraham, however, who said to her, "Is anything too wondrous for the LORD?" (v. 14). He did not tell her that the Holy One had revealed her secret to him. She, in turn, lied out of fear of Abraham, who she thought said it because he understood her so well, or because she failed to offer praise and thanks to God, or because she did not react with joy. **But He replied, "You did laugh."** Rather, "he" (Abraham) said this to her. When he said this, she realized that he had been told prophetically that she laughed, and she kept silent and did not respond. We must point out that Abraham had not revealed to her what he had been told earlier: "Nevertheless, Sarah your wife shall bear you a son" (17:19). Perhaps he was waiting until the Holy One sent the news to her personally. For "the Lord GOD does nothing without having revealed His purpose to His servants the prophets" (Amos 3:7), and in this case the prophet concerned was Sarah. Or perhaps he was preoccupied with the mass circumcision, after which his own discomfort led him to relax at the entrance of the tent; the angels came before he had the chance to tell her anything.

17 The LORD had said. To the heavenly host in attendance on Him, or to the angels He was sending. Or perhaps the Hebrew words mean "The Lord thought." The verb "say" can be used in this way: "Ishbi-benob *intended* to kill David" (2 Sam. 21:16); "I had *thought*: I must depart in the middle of my days" (Isa. 38:10). Certainly the idiom "to say in one's heart" refers to thought and intent.

18 Since Abraham is to become a great and populous nation. See Rashi's comment. The Holy One was really speaking in praise of Abraham: "He is going to become a great nation, whom his own offspring and the whole world will remember as a source of

[D] See Judges 13.

RASHBAM always means "but rather." This, of course, is one of the four normal meanings of *ki*. **[C]** It sometimes means this even without *lo*: "you shall not bow down to their gods in worship or follow their practices, *but* shall tear them down" (Exod. 23:24); "do not harden your heart and shut your hand against your needy kinsman. *Rather*, you must open your hand and lend him sufficient for whatever he needs" (Deut. 15:7–8).

16 The men set out from there. Two of them went to Sodom: "The two angels arrived in Sodom" (19:1). The chief of the three remained to speak with Abraham. "The LORD" of vv. 17 and 22 refers to this third angel.

17 Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do? The fact that I intend to annihilate Sodom. I know that his descendants will keep the ways of the Lord and will earn the fulfillment of the promise I made to Abraham, to give them the land of Canaan. Now, these cities are part of that inheritance: "Canaanite territory extended from Sidon as far as Gerar, near Gaza, and as far as Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboiim, near Lasha" (10:19). How can I destroy his property against his will? (For it was not merely his current neighbors' property, but his own.)

[C] See Rashi's comment.

IBN EZRA **18 All the nations of the earth are to bless themselves by him.** Rather, they "shall be blessed in him," that

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **"You did laugh."** Rather, he, Abraham, said this to her. "I believe the Holy One more than I believe you" (Bekhor Shor).

16 The men set out from there and looked down toward Sodom. Two of them did so (see 19:1). The one who had come to notify Sarah did not go there; he knew nothing about it. This goes to show just how little prophecy a prophet at this level might have (Gersonides). **Abraham walking with them to see them off.** But they said nothing to him, even to politely take their leave, knowing that it would disturb the prophetic experience he was having (Abarbanel).

17 Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do? It is possible that the angels were refraining from discussing the mission because Abraham, quite innocently, was tagging along. The Holy One let them know there was no need to keep silent about it, and in the following verses He begins to discuss it with them. But more likely the Holy One said this to Himself or to his retinue (Abarbanel).

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NJPS him? [19]For I have singled him out, that he may instruct his children and his posterity to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is just and right, in order that the LORD may bring about for Abraham what He has promised him." [20]Then the LORD said, "The outrage of Sodom and Gomorrah is so great, and

הָאָרֶץ׃ [19] כִּי יְדַעְתִּיו לְמַעַן אֲשֶׁר יְצַוֶּה
אֶת־בָּנָיו וְאֶת־בֵּיתוֹ אַחֲרָיו וְשָׁמְרוּ דֶּרֶךְ
יְהוָה לַעֲשׂוֹת צְדָקָה וּמִשְׁפָּט לְמַעַן הָבִיא
יְהוָה עַל־אַבְרָהָם אֵת אֲשֶׁר־דִּבֶּר עָלָיו׃
[20] וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה זַעֲקַת סְדֹם וַעֲמֹרָה כִּי־

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ What is the real meaning of the Hebrew word translated by NJPS as "I have singled him out" and by OJPS as "I have known him" (v. 19)? ✦ Since He knew that "the outrage of Sodom and Gomorrah is so great" (v. 20), why did the Lord need to investigate any further? ✦ What was "their sin so grave" that it warranted complete destruction? It is not actually described anywhere in the Bible. And it is hard to believe that they committed sins worse than those of many other wicked places that were not destroyed in this way.

OJPS be blessed in him? [19]For I have known him, to the end that he may command his children and his household after him, that they may keep the way of the LORD, to do righteousness and justice; to the end that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which He hath spoken of him." [20]And the LORD said: "Verily, the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and,

RASHI blessed him. But the straightforward sense is simply: Can I conceal it from him who is so beloved before Me that he is to become a great and populous nation, one by whom all other nations on earth will be blessed?

19 I have singled him out. Literally, "I have known him" (OJPS), a term of endearment: "Now there is our *kinsman* Boaz" (Ruth 3:2). The Holy One uses the same expression with regard to Moses in Exod. 33:17. In all these cases, the point is that one is so close to the other person that one knows the person intimately. **That he may instruct his children.** This is the reason for His intimacy with Abraham: "He instructs his children about Me and tells them to keep My ways." You cannot explain it as Onkelos does, "I know him" and so forth, meaning "I know that he will instruct his children." For *lema'an* does not mean plain "that"; it means "to the end that" (OJPS), "in order that." The verb, by the way, is a habitual tense here, not a future, as in "This is what Job *always used to do*" (Job 1:5). "I became intimate with him so that he would always instruct his children" and so forth. **In order that the LORD may bring about for Abraham what He has promised him.** Abraham was instructing his children to do what is just and right "in order that the LORD may bring about for Abraham what He has promised him"—for Abraham, not for Abraham's descendants. We learn that one who leaves behind righteous children does not die.

20 Then the LORD said. To Abraham, carrying out His intention not to conceal it from him. **Great.** The accent on the Hebrew word shows that it is not an adjective but a verb: their sin "has grown so great." See my comments to "when the sun set" (15:17) and "your sister-in-law has returned" (Ruth 1:15).

RASHBAM **20 Then the LORD said.** The angel said to Abraham: I am sending these agents on account of **the outrage of Sodom**: "the inhabitants of Sodom were very wicked sinners" (13:13).

IBN EZRA is, on his account. That is the difference between the Niphal (in our verse) and the Hitpael of "All the nations of the earth shall bless themselves" (22:18). **[B]**

20 Then the LORD said. Whether He said the previous things in the chapter to Abraham or to the angels (for them to say it to Abraham), this He certainly said to

[B] See Special Topics, "Biblical Hebrew."

KIMHI **19 That he may instruct his children and his posterity to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is just and right.** He will know that the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah was deliberate and not a chance event of the kind we sometimes see: "He told me He was going to destroy them." But "his posterity" is really "his household" (OJPS), including his servants. As David said, "He who follows the way of the blameless shall be in my service. He who deals deceitfully shall not live in my house" (Ps. 101:6–7).

20 The outrage of Sodom and Gomorrah. And all the rest of the lands of the five kings, "the land of the Plain" (19:28). Moses noted this when he wrote, "the upheaval of Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboiim" (Deut. 29:22), and so did the prophet: "How can

NAHMANIDES blessing. So I must not hide this from him. Otherwise, future generations will complain, 'How could He have hidden it from him? Or how could that righteous man be so cruel as not to take pity on his neighbors and pray for them? Instead, what God intended to do was perfectly fine with him!' For I know that he realizes that I love righteousness and justice, meaning that I do justice rightly. So he will command his household and his family after him to keep to the right path. Now, if there is a way to do justice and still exonerate them, he will pray that I leave them alone, and that is fine. But if they are completely guilty, he too will want justice done to them. So he ought to be brought into the Lord's council." **[E]**

19 For I have singled him out, that he may instruct his children and his posterity. See Rashi's comments. It could of course be that "I have known him" (as OJPS more literally translates) does indeed mean "I have singled him out," that is, "I have made him great," in order that "he may instruct his children" to do what is right. That would be the reason he will become "a great and populous nation"—so that he can serve the Holy One. "I have singled you out by name" (Exod. 33:12) and "what is man that You should care about him" (Ps. 144:3) use the expression that way. Or Onkelos's translation might be correct; see "*that* your ox and your ass may rest" (Exod. 23:12). **[F]** But in my view the verse is indeed speaking about "knowing" in the literal sense of the word. The knowledge of the Holy One is the providence He exercises over the lower world, preserving the species as they are but leaving individuals, even human beings, subject to random occurrences until their time is up. But for those who are loyal to Him, He turns His attention to them to know the particulars about them. His protection is therefore connected to them permanently; His knowledge and awareness of them is never absent: "He does not withdraw His eyes from the righteous" (Job 36:7). There are many other verses that point in this direction, e.g. "the eye of the LORD is on those who fear Him" (Ps. 33:18).

20 The LORD said. All the commentators agree with Rashi and Ibn Ezra that the Lord said this to Abraham. This would imply that while "the men went on from there to Sodom" (v. 22), Abraham kept praying before the Lord to forgive them, and to give him permission to speak. He kept requesting permission until they actually reached Sodom, which is when "Abraham came forward" (v. 23) and so on. But

[E] "Council" and "secret" are the same word in Hebrew. **[F]** It is not clear how to reconcile this with Nahmanides' comment to that verse, where he says that *lema'an* means "in order that."

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **19 For I have singled him out.** Rather, "I will know him" (compare OJPS), with the past tense indicating the future, as it does (e.g.) in 1 Kings 13:2, "A son shall be born to the House of David," and in many other prophecies. The Holy One will know the nation that branches out from Abraham and will exercise divine providence over them (Gersonides).

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NJPS their sin so grave! 21I will go down to see whether they have acted altogether according to the outcry that has reached Me; if not, I will take note."

OJPS verily, their sin is exceeding grievous. 21I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come unto Me; and if not, I will know."

רַבָּה וְחַטָּאתָם כִּי כָבְדָה מְאֹד׃ 21 אֵרְדָה־
נָּא וְאֶרְאֶה הַכְּצַעֲקָתָהּ הַבָּאָה אֵלַי עָשׂוּ |
כָּלָה וְאִם־לֹא אֵדָעָה׃

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ What need was there for the Lord to "go down" (v. 21) in order to see? In 6:5 He simply "saw" without going down. ✦ Why does the Lord say, "If not, I will take note"? Will He not "take note" whether it is so or not?

RASHI **21 I will go down to see.** He thereby taught all judges not to impose sentence for capital crimes without looking at the evidence, as I explained in my comment to "the LORD came down to look" (11:5). Another reading: "I will get" to the bottom of their deeds. **Altogether.** In Hebrew, this word actually follows the entire phrase "whether they have acted according to the outcry that has reached Me." The sense is as follows: "I will go down to see. If they persist in their rebellion—altogether!" I will altogether destroy them. That is why our verse has a *pasek* before the word "altogether," to indicate that it is separate from what precedes it. **According to the outcry.** Literally, "according to the cry *of it*" (OJPS), the city. But the midrash on B. Sanh. 109b takes it as "the cry *of her*"—the girl whom they put to death in horrible fashion for having given food to a poor man. **If not, I will take note.** Rather, if they do not maintain their rebellion, "I know" what I will do to them. I will make them suffer punishment but will not completely destroy them. See similarly "Now, then, leave off your finery, *for I know* what to do to you" (Exod. 33:5).

KIMHI I make you like Admah, render you like Zeboiim?" (Hosea 11:8). But Sodom and Gomorrah were the major towns; in fact, Sodom was the metropolis of the whole area, as we see from what the area is called in Ezekiel 16: "Sodom and her daughters." The "cry" (OJPS) was the outcry of those the violence was aimed at. They committed other sins as well, but violence is the one that God could not stand. That sealed their doom.

21 I will go down to see. See my comments to "the LORD came down to look" (11:5). These words presented Abraham with an opening to see whether there was a way he might be able to get them off.

NAHMANIDES it might just as well be that the prayer that begins in v. 23 went on all through the men's journey to Sodom. Notice that Abraham keeps saying things like "Let not my Lord be angry if I go on" (v. 30), which certainly extended the prayer. Moreover, after each of his requests, Abraham had to focus his mind and wait until he received a prophetic answer to his words from the Holy One. This certainly could have taken all afternoon, after which, "when the LORD had finished speaking to Abraham," in the evening, "He departed" (v. 33). That is when "the two angels arrived in Sodom" (19:1). **The outrage of Sodom and Gomorrah is so great.** If the "outrage" here really refers to the "outcry" of the victims, the verse would have to be understood as if the Lord were saying, "The outrage of Sodom and Gomorrah is so great *that I have heard it*." Or it might have said what the translators offer us. But the Hebrew includes *ki*, "that." What this passage is really saying is the following: "The outrage of Sodom and Gomorrah is so great, and their sin is so grave, *that* I must go down to see. If they have all sinned, I will execute judgment on them. If not, let Me know who the sinners are."

21 I will go down to see. See Rashi's comment. The straightforward sense is that the Holy One wished to reveal to Abraham that there was "none who does good, not even one" (Ps. 14:3). What He was telling him was, "I have come to judge whether they have sinned so greatly that I must altogether destroy them. If not, I know what to do to them: 'I will punish their transgression with the rod, their iniquity with plagues' [Ps. 89:33]." The point is that no final decision had yet been made—but it now would be. The process is explained in Psalm 14: "The LORD looks down from heaven on mankind to find a man of understanding, a man mindful of God. All have turned bad, altogether foul" (Ps. 14:2–3). **Whether they have acted altogether according to the outcry that has reached Me.** Ibn Ezra's "profound mystery" comes from the "customs of the aliens" condemned in Isa. 2:6. I will reveal, allusively, the opinion of those who follow the tradition of Truth. **[G]** Our Sages explain the verse "For lo! the LORD is coming forth from His dwelling-place, He will come down and stride upon the heights of the earth" (Mic. 1:3) to mean that He is moving from one divine aspect to another. "He is coming forth from the aspect of mercy and striding into the aspect of justice." The same is true in our passage. The Lord said—to Himself—"The outrage of Sodom and Gomorrah is so great that I must go down from My aspect of mercy to My aspect of justice. Let Me look with mercy to see whether they have acted according to the outcry that has reached My aspect of justice. If they have, I will altogether destroy them. **If not, I will take note** and act mercifully." This usage of "know" (see OJPS) is akin to that in "God *took notice* of them" (Exod. 2:25), where the same verb is used. After the text reveals what the Holy One was thinking (here in vv. 20–21), it returns to the action of the story.

[G] The "tradition" in this sense is what we call kabbalah, mystical truth.

RASHBAM **21 They have acted altogether.** Note the *pasek* between the two Hebrew words, separating them into two phrases. "If they have so acted, I will altogether destroy them."

IBN EZRA Abraham. The fact that "the outcry" had reached Him (v. 21) indicates that the angels had already arrived in Sodom by the time this episode occurred, though we are not told so until v. 22. **The outrage of Sodom and Gomorrah.** Literally, "the cry." Either they spoke out against the Lord, or this "outcry" (see the use of the same word in v. 21) refers to the violence they committed. **And their sin so grave.** So grave that the land cannot bear it.

21 Whether they have acted altogether according to the outcry that has reached Me. If they have, I will act "altogether," totally, against them. But in my opinion "whether they have acted altogether" means "whether all of them have so acted." For the truth is that the All knows every particular only as part of the whole and not as a particular. **[C]** The proof that this is the true understanding of our phrase, though it is a profound mystery, is Abraham's question in v. 23, "Will You sweep away the innocent along with the guilty?" **[D] If not, I will take note.** Rather, "I will [once again] be on intimate terms with them—I will take pity on them." See "God looked upon the Israelites, and God *took notice* of them" (Exod. 2:25).

[C] See Special Topics, "Medieval Jewish Philosophy." **[D]** Abraham's question seems to presume that God does not know whether particular individuals are righteous or not.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **21 I will go down to see.** This is metaphoric (Gersonides). This is why the angels were sent: to see whether the people of Sodom had actually done what they planned. It is not a theological problem for angels to find out something they did not previously know (Abarbanel). **Whether they have acted altogether.** Rather, "whether all of them have acted" (Sforno). **If not, I will take note.** I will figure out what to do to them to make sure the punishment fits the crime (Bekhor Shor). Rather, if they have not sinned then "I will know" (OJPS) them too and will exercise providential care over them and rescue them (Gersonides).

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NJPS [22]The men went on from there to Sodom, while Abraham remained standing before the LORD. [23]Abraham came forward and said, "Will You sweep away the innocent along with the guilty? [24]What if there should be fifty innocent within the

[22] וַיִּפְנוּ מִשָּׁם הָאֲנָשִׁים וַיֵּלְכוּ סְדֹמָה
וְאַבְרָהָם עוֹדֶנּוּ עֹמֵד לִפְנֵי יְהוָה׃ [23] וַיִּגַּשׁ
אַבְרָהָם וַיֹּאמַר הַאַף תִּסְפֶּה צַדִּיק עִם־
רָשָׁע׃ [24] אוּלַי יֵשׁ חֲמִשִּׁים צַדִּיקִם בְּתוֹךְ

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why did the three men go on "from there to Sodom" (v. 22)? If they were angels, their task was not to destroy the city, since the Lord Himself does that. And they did not go there to save Lot, who could have been saved by the Holy One just as Noah and his family were. Or Abraham could have sent him a message telling him to get out of town. ✦ Why does the announcement of their going to Sodom interrupt the conversation between Abraham and the Lord? ✦ What made Abraham think that the Holy One intended to "sweep away the innocent along with the guilty" (v. 23)? In v. 21, He had told Abraham explicitly that He intended to investigate! ✦ Why does Abraham switch from his plea about saving the innocent to request that even the wicked be saved if there are "fifty innocent" (v. 24) among them?

OJPS [22]And the men turned from thence, and went toward Sodom; but Abraham stood yet before the LORD. [23]And Abraham drew near, and said: "Wilt Thou indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked? [24]Peradventure there are fifty righteous within the city; wilt Thou indeed

RASHI **22 The men went on from there.** From the place to which Abraham had accompanied them. **While Abraham remained standing before the LORD.** Abraham had not gone to stand before Him; rather, it was the Holy One who had come to Abraham to say what He said in vv. 20–21. So our phrase really should be, "while the Lord remained standing before Abraham." The text as it stands is a "correction of the scribes," **[C]** that is, it was reversed by the Sages.

23 Abraham came forward. We find the Hebrew verb used both when one "comes forward" to fight (e.g., 1 Chron. 19:14), when one "comes forward" to appease someone (e.g., 44:18), and when one "comes forward" to pray (e.g., 1 Kings 18:36). Abraham was coming forward now for all three reasons. **Will You sweep away the innocent along with the guilty?** The Hebrew *af* (untranslated by NJPS) makes it "will You *indeed* sweep away" (see OJPS) or "will You *even* sweep away." But Onkelos translates it as if it were the noun *af* meaning "anger": "Will Your anger make You sweep away the innocent along with the guilty?"

24 What if there should be fifty innocent within the city? That is, 10 in each of the cities (remember that there were five of them), for a total of 50. **Will You then wipe out the place and not forgive it for the sake of the innocent fifty who are in it?** And even if You do not agree that the innocent

[C] See the "additional comment" of the Masorah; the number 18 mentioned there is traditional and not precise.

RASHBAM **23 Sweep away.** That is, "destroy," the verb used parallel to "sweep away" in Deut. 32:23.

24 Within the city. Of Sodom. The king of Sodom was the head of all the kingdoms in that region.

IBN EZRA **22 The men went on from there to Sodom.** This interrupts what "the LORD said" starting in v. 20, just as "and he walked ahead" interrupts what Samuel says to Saul in 1 Sam. 9:29. **While Abraham remained standing before the LORD.** See 19:27. There is no need to invoke a "correction of the scribes" here.

23 Sweep away. That is, "wipe out" (v. 24), which uses the same Hebrew verb (see OJPS). Compare "I will *sweep* misfortunes on them, use up My arrows on them" (Deut. 32:23), though there the verb is in Hiphil and here it is in Qal.

24 The place. Sodom, which Abraham was trying to save because of Lot.

KIMHI **22 Abraham remained standing before the LORD.** His prophetic vision was not yet over.

23 Abraham came forward. The verb does not indicate physical movement, but a legal motion.

24 What if there should be fifty innocent within the city? The city of Sodom; or perhaps it means "each city." If the former, finding 50 innocent people in Sodom, the biggest of the cities, would imply that there were innocent people in the smaller cities as well. "Fifty"

NAHMANIDES **22 The men went on from there to Sodom.** And they arrived there. **While Abraham remained standing before the LORD.** As he had been since the men took their leave of him. The Lord had summoned him, in accordance with what we just read in vv. 17–19, and explained to him that the angels had been sent to destroy Sodom. There was no need for the text to explain precisely when Abraham first "stood" before the Lord; "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do?" (v. 17) makes quite clear that He did indeed tell him.

23 Will You sweep away the innocent along with the guilty? Rather, as Onkelos translates, will "Your anger" (that is, Your aspect of justice) sweep the innocent away along with the guilty? Abraham did not know that the Holy One was considering them with His aspect of mercy, as I have explained. That is why he insisted that it would be right and proper to save the whole place for the sake of 50 innocent people. But even the aspect of justice would not kill the innocent along with the guilty. If that were to happen, there would be no difference between innocent and guilty. People would think, "It is useless to serve God" (Mal. 3:14). Now, if that is true of the aspect of justice, it is even more true of the aspect of mercy, which rules the world justly. That is why "Far be it from You" occurs twice in v. 25—once for each. The Holy One did indeed agree not to destroy the city for the sake of 50 innocent people, which shows quite clearly that He was acting in accordance with His aspect of mercy. The fact that the whole story is told using the name "LORD," the Tetragrammaton, which represents the aspect of mercy, but that Abraham uses the actual word "Lord" (which represents the aspect of justice), shows you this. That should clarify things.

24 What if there should be fifty innocent within the city? See Rashi's comments about the numbers in this section. But why would Abraham be so apologetic? If 50 innocent people could save all five cities, certainly 40 could save four of the cities. Why keep saying "Let not my Lord be angry" and the like? And the same ratio would hold for three cities or two. As for 9 plus the Shekhinah (see Rashi to v. 32), just because 9 could not be found for each of the five cities (totaling 45) does not mean that 9 could not be found to save

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **22 While Abraham remained standing before the LORD.** This is one of the 18 biblical phrases that are a "correction of the scribes" (Masorah). According to the midrashic explanation, despite everything that had gone on, Abraham was still mentally focused on contemplation of the Holy One (Abarbanel). He was listening to what He said to the angels (Abarbanel).

23 Will You sweep away the innocent along with the guilty? Having said that you would "altogether" (v. 21) destroy them (Bekhor Shor). The deaths of their relatives and their neighbors would not leave them unscathed (Abarbanel).

24 The place. The whole region, including Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboiim (Gersonides).

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NJPS city; will You then wipe out the place and not forgive it for the sake of the innocent fifty who are in it? 25Far be it from You to do such a thing, to bring death upon the innocent as well as the guilty, so that innocent and guilty fare alike. Far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?" 26And the LORD answered, "If I find within the city of Sodom fifty innocent ones, I will forgive the

OJPS sweep away and not forgive the place for the fifty righteous that are therein? 25That be far from Thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked, that so the righteous should be as the wicked; that be far from Thee; shall not the Judge of all the earth do justly?" 26And the LORD said: "If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will

הָעִיר הַאַף תִּסְפֶּה֙ וְלֹא־תִשָּׂא לַמָּקוֹם
לְמַ֣עַן חֲמִשִּׁ֔ים הַצַּדִּיקִ֖ם אֲשֶׁ֥ר בְּקִרְבָּֽהּ׃
25 חָלִ֣לָה לְךָ֔ מֵעֲשֹׂ֖ת | כַּדָּבָ֣ר הַזֶּ֑ה לְהָמִ֤ית
צַדִּיק֙ עִם־רָשָׁ֔ע וְהָיָ֥ה כַצַּדִּ֖יק כָּרָשָׁ֑ע
חָלִ֣לָה לָּ֔ךְ הֲשֹׁפֵ֥ט כָּל־הָאָ֖רֶץ לֹ֥א יַעֲשֶׂ֖ה
מִשְׁפָּֽט׃ 26 וַיֹּ֣אמֶר יְהוָ֔ה אִם־אֶמְצָ֥א בִסְדֹ֛ם
חֲמִשִּׁ֥ים צַדִּיקִ֖ם בְּת֣וֹךְ הָעִ֑יר וְנָשָׂ֥אתִי

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why does Abraham say "Far be it from You!" (v. 25) twice? ✦ How can Abraham ask, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?" when he himself has just proposed that justice *not* be imposed on the wicked, and when he knows quite well that the inhabitants of Sodom are wicked sinners? Why does he not ask that they be treated mercifully, or simply pray for his own nephew Lot? What does Abraham stand to gain by demanding "justice" for Sodom? ✦ Why does Abraham start with 50 and end with 10? Why no higher and no lower?

RASHI 50 should save the wicked ones, why should you put the innocent ones to death?

25 Far be it from You. Literally, "that would be profane of You," not sacred. People will say, "That is how He operates—wiping out the whole, innocent and guilty alike." That is what You did to the generation of the Flood, and that is what You did to the generation of the Dispersion. **To do such a thing.** This particular thing or any such thing. **Far be it from You!** To wipe them out from the World to Come as well. **Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?** The vowel under the ה tells us that it is interrogative, not the definite article.

26 If I find within the city of Sodom fifty innocent ones, I will forgive the whole place for their sake. Since Sodom was the great metropolis of "the whole place"—the five cities—the text made their fate depend on it.

KIMHI is halfway to the second order of magnitude; "ten," where Abraham stops, is the first order of magnitude, below which one cannot go. **Will You then wipe out the place and not forgive it for the sake of the innocent fifty who are in it?** Note that he says "forgive *it*"—the place, not the people. There might be wicked people who would deserve individual punishment, but "the place" itself would not deserve to be destroyed if there were 50 innocents within it. Nonetheless, a place that is violent enough cannot remain settled. But when other transgressions grow large enough, God does not wipe out the place but sentences the wicked to famine, war, or exile, which may collaterally involve a few righteous people: "I will draw My sword from its sheath, and I will wipe out from you both the righteous and the wicked" (Ezek. 21:8).

25 Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly? You cannot claim to judge "all the earth" by judging just one part of it, and killing the righteous along with the wicked would not be just. So You must make known why You are altogether annihilating this land.

RASHBAM **25 Shall not the Judge of all the earth** —who sent you here—**deal justly?**

26 And the LORD answered. The angel answered. Similarly, it was he before whom Abraham stood in v. 22 to beseech him.

IBN EZRA **25 Far be it.** "It cannot be." Some take the root of the Hebrew word, which can also refer to empty "space," as indicating that the phrase points to something that is "nonexistent." **Upon the innocent as well as the guilty.** The Hebrew idiom is literally "like the innocent, like the guilty," a way of equating the two. For other examples, see the Hebrew of "you who are the equal of Pharaoh" (44:18); "I will do what you do; my troops shall be your troops, my horses shall be your horses" (1 Kings 22:4); "darkness and light are the same" (Ps. 139:12). **Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?** The previous expression asks whether two opposites can possibly be equal; here Abraham asks whether two things that are supposed to be the same could possibly *not* be equal.

26 If I find within the city of Sodom fifty innocent ones. Who fear the Lord "within the city"—in public. Compare "Roam the streets of Jerusalem, search its squares, look about and take note: You will

26 If I find within the city of Sodom fifty innocent ones, I will forgive the whole place for their sake. This response does not prove that Abraham was speaking only about Sodom. The Holy One knew that he was particularly concerned with Sodom because of Lot.

NAHMANIDES *one* city. Rashi seems to be suggesting that a greater number of innocent people should not save just proportionately more but exponentially more, as we read in Leviticus Rabbah: "The strength of a few who observe the Torah is not even close to the strength of many who observe the Torah." The Holy One completely agreed that 45 innocent people, added to the Righteous One of the world, would be enough to save all five cities, just as if there were a full 50. Clearly the same addition, once the Holy One has agreed to it, would work with enough innocent people to save four cities, or three, or two. **[H]** Do you think He might not agree to it with a smaller number than 45? Once the Holy One's own righteousness was attached in this way to human beings He would certainly make no such distinction. This is what Rashi's comment to v. 32 means. **[I]** But the straightforward sense of the passage is that he decreased the numbers steadily from a full complement of 10 innocent people per city, to 9, down to 2, which was as far as he thought he could go. Abraham intended throughout to save all five cities. I have no idea where Rashi got his notion.

26 Within the city. Ibn Ezra thinks the 50 innocent people in the city must be people who fear the Lord in public. But I think Abraham's reason for saying "within the city" was that even nonresidents who might be there should be counted toward saving it. He meant Lot, of course, but he thought there might be some others as well.

[H] Some texts add: "or one." **[I]** This still leaves unclear why Rashi thinks Abraham did not ask about nine.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **25 Far be it from You.** Rashi's comment about the second "Far be it from You" referring to the World to Come means "in the generations to come" (Hizkuni). "Far be it from You" is repeated once for each of the questions in the previous verse: "What if there should be" and "will You then wipe out" (Abarbanel). **Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?** Abraham knew that whatever number he could reach by invoking justice could then be extended by asking for mercy (Abarbanel).

26 If I find within the city of Sodom fifty innocent ones, I will forgive the whole place for their sake. The providence directed at the 50 "righteous" people (see OJPS) would be enough to save the whole place (Gersonides). As we know from Lev. 25:11, 50 is a holy number: "The fiftieth year shall be a jubilee for you" (Abarbanel).

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NJPS whole place for their sake." 27Abraham spoke up, saying, "Here I venture to speak to my Lord, I who am but dust and ashes: 28What if the fifty innocent should lack five? Will You destroy the whole city for want of the five?" And He answered, "I will not destroy if I find forty-five there." 29But he spoke to Him again, and said, "What if forty should be found there?" And He answered, "I will not do it, for the sake of the forty." 30And he said, "Let not my Lord be angry if I go on: What if thirty should be found there?" And He answered, "I will not do it if I find thirty there." 31And he said, "I venture again to speak to my Lord: What if twenty should be found there?" And He

לְכָל־הַמָּקוֹם בַּעֲבוּרָם׃ 27 וַיַּעַן אַבְרָהָם
וַיֹּאמַר הִנֵּה־נָא הוֹאַלְתִּי לְדַבֵּר אֶל־אֲדֹנָי
וְאָנֹכִי עָפָר וָאֵפֶר׃ 28 אוּלַי יַחְסְרוּן
חֲמִשִּׁים הַצַּדִּיקִם חֲמִשָּׁה הֲתַשְׁחֵית
בַּחֲמִשָּׁה אֶת־כָּל־הָעִיר וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא
אַשְׁחִית אִם־אֶמְצָא שָׁם אַרְבָּעִים
וַחֲמִשָּׁה׃ 29 וַיֹּסֶף עוֹד לְדַבֵּר אֵלָיו וַיֹּאמֶר
אוּלַי יִמָּצְאוּן שָׁם אַרְבָּעִים וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא
אֶעֱשֶׂה בַּעֲבוּר הָאַרְבָּעִים׃ 30 וַיֹּאמֶר אַל־
נָּא יִחַר לַאדֹנָי וַאֲדַבֵּרָה אוּלַי יִמָּצְאוּן
שָׁם שְׁלֹשִׁים וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא אֶעֱשֶׂה אִם־
אֶמְצָא שָׁם שְׁלֹשִׁים׃ 31 וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּה־נָא
הוֹאַלְתִּי לְדַבֵּר אֶל־אֲדֹנָי אוּלַי יִמָּצְאוּן
שָׁם עֶשְׂרִים וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא אַשְׁחִית בַּעֲבוּר

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why does Abraham sometimes beg pardon for asking—as in "Here I venture to speak to my Lord" of v. 27—but sometimes he just asks? It would at least make sense if he had begun with an apology of this kind, but he doesn't. ✦ God's responses too differ. What is the difference between "I will not destroy" (e.g., v. 28), "I will not do it" (e.g., v. 29), and "I will forgive" (v. 26)? ✦ Why did the Torah record all this in the first place, since Abraham's prayer achieved nothing? ✦ Why did the Holy One refuse Abraham, when the angel of 19:21 granted Lot's much briefer request?

RASHI **27 Here I venture.** That is, "I am willing." Compare "Moses *consented* to stay with the man" (Exod. 2:21). **I who am but dust and ashes.** I might have already been turned into dust by the four kings, and to ashes by Nimrod, were it not for Your compassion toward me.

28 Will You destroy the whole city for want of the five? That is still 9 per city, and counting You, the righteous One of the world, along with them makes 10.

29 What if forty should be found there? So four of the cities could escape. Similarly, "thirty" (v. 30) could save three cities, "twenty" (v. 31) could save two cities, and "ten" (v. 32) could save one city.

31 I venture again. See my comment to "Here I venture" (v. 27).

KIMHI **27 I venture to speak.** That is, "I would like to speak." **I who am but dust and ashes.** I am only trying to learn what You mean by "justice."

29 I will not do it, for the sake of the forty. "Do" is עשה, which begins with ע. In the other cases, He says "I will not destroy" (e.g., v. 28), but for 30 and 40 He says "I will not do it." This is easy to remember because 30 + 40 = 70, which is the numerical value of ע.

NAHMANIDES **28 I will not destroy if I find forty-five there.** He promised not to destroy the city under those conditions. He would not tell him, "Look—there *aren't* 45 there," because the investigation had not yet been concluded. He had said, "I will go down to see" (v. 21), and Abraham did not know what might happen to them. That is precisely why "Abraham hurried to the place" (19:27) early the next morning and "looked down toward Sodom and Gomorrah" (19:28). Once he saw that they had been destroyed, he knew that there had not been enough innocent people there to save the cities.

OJPS forgive all the place for their sake." 27And Abraham answered and said: "Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, who am but dust and ashes. 28Peradventure there shall lack five of the fifty righteous; wilt Thou destroy all the city for lack of five?" And He said: "I will not destroy it, if I find there forty and five." 29And he spoke unto Him yet again, and said: "Peradventure there shall be forty found there." And He said: "I will not do it for the forty's sake." 30And he said: "Oh, let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak. Peradventure there shall thirty be found there." And He said: "I will not do it, if I find thirty there." 31And he said: "Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord. Peradventure there shall be twenty

IBN EZRA not find a man, there is none who acts justly, who seeks integrity—that I should pardon her" (Jer. 5:1).

27 Here I venture. The verb does not mean "I begin" but "I would like." See "Moses *undertook* to expound this Teaching" (Deut. 1:5). **[E] I.** "I" here is *anokhi*. Either this word is formed by adding a כ to *ani*, or they are two separate words with a single meaning. **Who am but dust and ashes.** For I was dust and I return to ashes. The bones, at least—the basic structure of the body—return to earth, the element from which they were made.

28 What if the fifty innocent should lack five? That is, one-tenth.

29 What if forty should be found there? Lacking one-ninth of the total we agreed to in v. 28. **I will not do it, for the sake of the forty.** I will not destroy it.

30 What if thirty should be found there? Lacking one-fourth of the 40. Starting here, he goes down by tens rather than fives, for brevity's sake.

31 What if twenty should be found there? Lacking one-third of the 30.

[E] In his comment there, Ibn Ezra accepts the meaning "begin."

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **27 Here I venture to speak to my Lord.** Rather, "I *have* ventured" to ask concerning my doubts about divine justice (Sforno). **I who am but dust and ashes.** He intended to go on at length and therefore made sure to say, "It is not because of my own importance that I am speaking this way" (Bekhor Shor). Rather, "*and* I, dust and ashes." See my comment to the next verse (Abarbanel). Being dust and ashes, I have not been able to penetrate to the depths of Your response (Sforno).

28 What if the fifty innocent should lack five? At first he made a very small additional request. But once he saw that it was "a favorable moment" (Ps. 69:14), he began to go down by tens. He reasoned: "Since the Holy One is willing to listen to me, if I don't pray for them and they die it will be my fault." But once he got down to 10, he realized that if there were fewer the Holy One would just save them and kill the wicked. And he did not want to push God too far (Bekhor Shor). Abraham was not asking the Holy One to join with the 9 innocents per city; "and I" of v. 27 tells us that he was asking that *he* be included to make up the number (Abarbanel).

29 What if forty should be found there? Abraham found a roundabout way of saying 45, since he only wanted to mention significant numbers: 40, the number of days it takes for a fetus to form, and the number of days (at a time) that Moses spent on Mount Sinai; 30, for the 10 levels on each of the three worlds, the spiritual world, the upper world, and the lower world; 20, for the 10 generations from Adam to Noah plus the 10 from Noah to Abraham; and the final 10 to match the 10 Separate Intelligences as well as the many other sacred tens (Abarbanel).

30 Let not my Lord be angry. Though now I am going down by tens instead of by fives (Abarbanel).

31 What if twenty should be found there? If three cities are destroyed, the other two cannot be unscathed by the destruction (Sforno).

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NJPS answered, "I will not destroy, for the sake of the twenty." 32And he said, "Let not my Lord be angry if I speak but this last time: What if ten should be found there?" And He answered, "I will not destroy, for the sake of the ten."

33When the LORD had finished speaking to Abraham, He departed; and Abraham returned to his place.

19 The two angels arrived in Sodom in the evening, as Lot was sitting in the gate of Sodom. When Lot saw them, he rose to greet them and, bowing low with his face

OJPS found there." And He said: "I will not destroy it for the twenty's sake." 32And he said: "Oh, let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak yet but this once. Peradventure ten shall be found there." And He said: "I will not destroy it for the ten's sake."

33And the LORD went His way, as soon as He had left off speaking to Abraham; and Abraham returned unto his place.

19 And the two angels came to Sodom at even; and Lot sat in the gate of Sodom; and Lot saw them, and rose up to meet them; and he fell down on his face to the

הָעֲשָׂרִים׃ 32 וַיֹּאמֶר אַל־נָא יִחַר לַאדֹנָי וַאֲדַבְּרָה אַךְ־הַפַּעַם אוּלַי יִמָּצְאוּן שָׁם עֲשָׂרָה וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא אַשְׁחִית בַּעֲבוּר הָעֲשָׂרָה׃ 33 וַיֵּלֶךְ יְהוָה כַּאֲשֶׁר כִּלָּה לְדַבֵּר אֶל־אַבְרָהָם וְאַבְרָהָם שָׁב לִמְקֹמוֹ׃

שלישי

יט וַיָּבֹאוּ שְׁנֵי הַמַּלְאָכִים סְדֹמָה בָּעֶרֶב וְלוֹט יֹשֵׁב בְּשַׁעַר־סְדֹם וַיַּרְא־לוֹט וַיָּקָם לִקְרָאתָם וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ אַפַּיִם אָרְצָה׃

RASHI **32 What if ten should be found there?** He did not ask about any lower number. He reasoned: The generation of the Flood totaled 8, Noah and his three sons plus four wives, and they could not save the others. As for 9 (plus the Shekhinah), he had already sought 9 and not found them. **[D]**

33 He departed. Once the defense rested, the judge departed. **Abraham returned to his place.** Once both the judge and the defense attorney were gone, the prosecutor was free to accuse, and "the two angels arrived in Sodom" to destroy it.

19:1 The two angels. One to destroy Sodom and one (the same one who had come to heal Abraham) to rescue Lot. As for the third angel, the one who had come to announce that Sarah would have a son—once he had accomplished his mission he left. Note that, up to now—when the Shekhinah was with them—these angels have been referred to as "men" by comparison. Another reading: With Abraham, who had great strength, and who was visited by angels as frequently as he was by men, they too were called men. But with Lot, they are called angels. **In the evening.** Did it take that long for the angels to get from Hebron to Sodom? But they were angels of mercy, and waited to see whether Abraham would succeed in arguing on the cities' behalf. **Lot was sitting in the gate of Sodom.** The consonants could be read to say, "Lot had sat." That very day they appointed him to rule over them. **When Lot saw them, he rose to greet them.** He had learned in Abraham's house to go around looking for guests.

[D] No one has succeeded in making good sense of this last sentence, which is missing in Rashi's source, Genesis Rabbah. But see Nahmanides' comment to v. 24.

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why are we told that "when the LORD had finished speaking to Abraham, He departed" (v. 33), language that is used with none of Abraham's other prophecies? The only even comparable occasion is in 17:22—but in that case at least there was a reason for us to be told that "God was gone."

✦ Why are the "two angels" (v. 1) in this story sometimes called angels and sometimes men, especially since in the previous chapter they are invariably called "men"?

IBN EZRA **32 What if ten should be found there?** Lacking one-half of the 20. Some explain Abraham's stopping with 10 by saying that this included 2 in each of the five cities, but that is not correct; he is speaking about Sodom only. Our Sages have transmitted a tradition that public prayer demands at least 10, and Abraham's stopping with 10 here certainly strengthens our faith in that rule.

33 Abraham returned to his place. To Hebron. This vision took place in the location where Abraham had gone to see off the men who had visited him, the site from which he would "look down toward Sodom and Gomorrah" (19:28).

19:1 In the evening. See my comment to "at twilight" (Exod. 12:6). **With his face to the ground.** Literally, "with his nostrils [which stick out from the face] to the ground."

KIMHI **32 Let not my Lord be angry.** He had already shortened his request by subtracting fives and tens rather than single numbers so as not to exasperate Him. **If I speak but this last time.** If 10 could not be found, he really had no case to make. Note that he did not mention Lot, assuming that if the whole place was to be destroyed Lot would be destroyed with them for having settled down there. And of course he did not know whether Lot was still righteous or whether he had assimilated to their way of life.

33 When the LORD had finished speaking to Abraham, He departed; and Abraham returned to his place. When the vision was over, Abraham found himself back in the place where he had been sitting. **[C]**

19:1 The two angels. The "men" of 18:22. But our Sages say that they are called "angels" with regard to Lot and "men" with regard to Abraham, who was such a great prophet that he was more at ease with them; see my comment to "bowing to the ground" (18:2). **When Lot saw them, he rose to greet them.** He had learned hospitality from our Patriarch Abraham.

[C] Kimhi apparently reads *shav*, "he returned," as a variant of *yashav*, "he sat."

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **32 What if ten should be found there?** Ten was the lowest number to which providence on the general level could connect. It is the second power of 10; the only lower power is one, that of the individual (Gersonides).

33 When the LORD had finished speaking to Abraham, He departed. To prevent Abraham from going any lower (Abarbanel). **Abraham returned to his place.** Only after the Holy One left. He did not turn his attention from prophecy deliberately, unlike what we read in 4:16, "Cain left the presence of the LORD" (Sforno).

19:1 The two angels. Rather, "the two messengers" sent by the Holy One. This verse is the answer to the Christians who think the "three men" of 18:2 are the parts of the Trinity; by the time they got to Sodom, one part was missing (Bekhor Shor). **Arrived in Sodom in the evening.** Abraham had delayed them a long time, but they arrived in Sodom that same evening, though it was a two-day trip. This proves that they were angels (Abarbanel). **Lot was sitting in the gate of Sodom.** Rather, he was "*dwelling* in the gate," having returned after the battle to his home "near Sodom" (13:12). That is why "he urged them" (v. 3). His home was secluded and there would be no need to worry about ruffians (Hizkuni). Either he was sitting there in judgment, as Genesis Rabbah suggests, or he just happened to be sitting there (Gersonides).

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NJPS to the ground, [2]he said, "Please, my lords, turn aside to your servant's house to spend the night, and bathe your feet; then you may be on your way early." But they said, "No, we will spend the night in the square." [3]But he urged them strongly, so they turned his way and entered his house. He prepared a feast for them and baked unleavened bread, and they ate.

[4]They had not yet lain down, when the

[2] וַיֹּ֣אמֶר הִנֶּה־נָ֣א אֲדֹנַ֗י סוּרוּ־נָא֙ אֶל־בֵּ֣ית
עַבְדְּכֶ֔ם וְלִינוּ֙ וְרַחֲצ֣וּ רַגְלֵיכֶ֔ם וְהִשְׁכַּמְתֶּ֖ם
וַהֲלַכְתֶּ֣ם לְדַרְכְּכֶ֑ם וַיֹּ֣אמְרוּ֩ לֹ֨א כִּ֤י בָרְחוֹב
נָלִ֙ין׃ [3] וַיִּפְצַר־בָּ֥ם מְאֹ֖ד וַיָּסֻ֣רוּ אֵלָ֑יו וַיָּבֹ֣אוּ
אֶל־בֵּיתוֹ֮ וַיַּ֣עַשׂ לָהֶם֒ מִשְׁתֶּ֔ה וּמַצּ֖וֹת אָפָ֑ה
וַיֹּאכֵֽלוּ׃
[4] טֶ֣רֶם יִשְׁכָּב֔וּן וְאַנְשֵׁ֥י הָעִ֖יר אַנְשֵׁ֣י סְדֹ֑ם

OJPS earth; [2]and he said: "Behold now, my lords, turn aside, I pray you, into your servant's house, and tarry all night, and wash your feet, and ye shall rise up early, and go on your way." And they said: "Nay; but we will abide in the broad place all night." [3]And he urged them greatly; and they turned in unto him, and entered into his house; and he made them a feast, and did bake unleavened bread, and they did eat.

[4]But before they lay down, the men of

RASHI **2 Please, my lords.** More precisely, "Behold now, you are my lords," having passed this way (compare OJPS). Another reading: "Behold!" You must look out for yourselves and make sure these wicked people do not see you. This explains the advice he goes on to give them. **Turn aside to your servant's house.** Take a roundabout path to my house so that they do not see you go in. (This is from Genesis Rabbah.) **To spend the night, and bathe your feet.** Do people ordinarily sleep first and wash in the morning? Wasn't the first thing Abraham told them "bathe your feet" (18:4)? But Lot reasoned this way: "If the people of Sodom come and find them with clean feet, they will accuse me of having had the men in my home for two or three days already without telling them. They had better stay as they are so it will be evident that they have just arrived." That is why he told them to "spend the night" first and only then to "bathe your feet." **But they said, "No."** To Abraham they had replied, "Do as you have said." We learn that one refuses the offer of a lesser person but accepts the offer of a great person. **We will spend the night in the square.** See "but" of OJPS, omitted by NJPS. This is *ki* with its "but rather" meaning. **[E]** What they are saying is, "No, we will not turn aside to your home; *rather,* we will spend the night in the square."

3 So they turned his way. Rather, "they took a roundabout way." **He prepared a feast for them and baked unleavened bread, and they ate.** This is how we know it was Passover. **[F]**

4 They had not yet lain down, when the townspeople. Genesis Rabbah interprets

[E] See Rashi's comment to 18:15. **[F]** See Rashi's comment to "next year" (18:10).

RASHBAM **19:2 No, we will spend the night in the square.** Again *ki* means "but rather" (see OJPS).

4 All the people to the last man. We are informed that not even one of Abraham's

IBN EZRA **2 Please, my lords.** As in 18:3, this is simply a polite greeting, not a reference to "the Lord." **Turn aside to your servant's house.** When the verb "turn aside" is followed by "from" it means to get away from something; when it is followed by "to," it is a request to leave one's place and approach the speaker or the place named. Compare what Jael said to Sisera, "*Come in,* my lord, *come in*" (Judg. 4:18). **But they said, "No."** They said it in a way that indicated, "Not unless you insist."

3 But he urged them. He spoke many words of persuasion.

4 To the last man. Rather, "from every quarter" (OJPS)—not just those who lived nearby.

KIMHI **2 My lords.** They were so impressive that at first he had taken them for angels. But if this was a vision, then he is actually saying, "O Lord." **Turn aside to your servant's house to spend the night.** Since it was evening, they needed a place to stay. **And bathe your feet.** See my comment to the same phrase in 18:4. This is the first thing one offers a guest. He has not yet said anything to them about eating or sleeping. **Then you may be on your way early.** If you wish. — Again, this parallels "then go on" of 18:5. **We will spend the night in the square.** But we will not be hosted by any of the townspeople.

3 He prepared a feast for them. Rather, "a light repast," with less food than drink. It was night and there was no time to slaughter an animal and prepare many dishes for them. He gave them something to drink and baked unleavened bread for them so they would not have to wait long. It is proper to prepare for a guest only what can be made quickly; he is fatigued and wants something to eat and drink. Remember that we are being told these details of the story in order to teach us such things. **They ate.** If this was a vision, then it appeared to him that they ate; if a real event, then too it appeared to him that they ate, but in fact the food and drink miraculously reverted to their original elemental essence.

4 The townspeople, the men of Sodom. The townspeople showed by their behavior that they were indeed "men of Sodom." **Young**

NAHMANIDES **19:2 Please, my lords.** See Rashi's comment. Lot was begging them to accept his hospitality. **Turn aside.** The Hebrew verb is the same as in "*Come in,* my lord, *come in*" (Judg. 4:18) and "*Come over* and sit down here" (Ruth 4:1). **Then you may be on your way early.** Rather, "but you must be on your way early." He was warning them not to linger in the town, knowing the wicked behavior of the men of the city. But he assumed they would save their wickedness to "do it when morning dawns" (Mic. 2:1). Or NJPS may be correct that he simply assumed that his guests had a long way to travel and was reassuring them that they could leave in the morning without delay.

3 But he urged them strongly. Lot was rewarded for so urging them, and his intention to offer them hospitality was a good one. In fact, they turned him down precisely to enable him to gain the reward for urging them, which is why they eventually agreed. At first, however, they really did not want to go to his house, since he was not perfectly righteous. The Sages, contrasting him with Abraham, say that one should turn down the offer of a lesser man but not of a great man; if that is so, then they were acting in accordance with human norms of politeness.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **2 No, we will spend the night in the square.** You want us to spend the night in your house out of fear? As messengers of the Holy One, we have a great escort. We'll spend the night in the square. Let's see what they can do (Bekhor Shor). Let them see that we have come to annihilate the city. Perhaps they will repent (Hizkuni). They wanted to spend the night in public to test whether the men of Sodom were really wicked (Abarbanel).

3 But he urged them strongly. He was clueless about their mission (Abarbanel).

4 To the last man. Literally, "from end." In Hebrew, these are the last words of the verse (see OJPS). They are found at the end of a verse elsewhere only in "from end to end" of Jer. 51:31 (Masorah).

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NJPS townspeople, the men of Sodom, young and old—all the people to the last man—gathered about the house. 5And they shouted to Lot and said to him, "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us, that we may be intimate with them." 6So Lot went out to them to the entrance, shut the door behind him, 7and said, "I beg you, my friends, do not commit such a wrong. 8Look, I have two daughters who have not known a man. Let

נָסַבּוּ עַל־הַבַּיִת מִנַּעַר וְעַד־זָקֵן כָּל־הָעָם
מִקָּצֶה׃ 5 וַיִּקְרְאוּ אֶל־לוֹט וַיֹּאמְרוּ לוֹ
אַיֵּה הָאֲנָשִׁים אֲשֶׁר־בָּאוּ אֵלֶיךָ הַלָּיְלָה
הוֹצִיאֵם אֵלֵינוּ וְנֵדְעָה אֹתָם׃ 6 וַיֵּצֵא
אֲלֵהֶם לוֹט הַפֶּתְחָה וְהַדֶּלֶת סָגַר אַחֲרָיו׃
7 וַיֹּאמֶר אַל־נָא אַחַי תָּרֵעוּ׃ 8 הִנֵּה־נָא לִי
שְׁתֵּי בָנוֹת אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יָדְעוּ אִישׁ אוֹצִיאָה־

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why would Lot imagine that giving his daughters to the men of Sodom (v. 8) would satisfy them?

OJPS the city, even the men of Sodom, compassed the house round, both young and old, all the people from every quarter. 5And they called unto Lot, and said unto him: "Where are the men that came in to thee this night? bring them out unto us, that we may know them." 6And Lot went out unto them to the door, and shut the door after him. 7And he said: "I pray you, my brethren, do not so wickedly. 8Behold now, I have two daughters that have not

RASHI the Hebrew phrase this way: "Before they lay down, [the angels said to Lot] 'and the townspeople?'" The angels asked Lot what they were like and how they acted. He replied, "Most of them are wicked." They were still talking when "the men of Sodom . . . gathered about the house." But the straightforward sense is that the townspeople, who were "men of Sodom" (i.e., wicked; see 13:13), gathered about the house. **To the last man.** Literally, "from end," from one end of town to the other. No one protested; there was not a single righteous man among them.

5 That we may be intimate with them. Sexually. Compare v. 8. In this case they intended to have homosexual relations.

8 These. Note the use of the shortened form of the Hebrew word. **Since they have**

RASHBAM "ten" (18:32) was found among them.

5 That we may be intimate with them. The Hebrew says merely "that we may know them" (OJPS), but they intended to have homosexual relations with them. The same is true when this idiom is repeated in the "concubine in Gibeah" story, when the men of the town say, "Bring out the man who has come into your house, so that we can be intimate with him" (Judg. 19:22).

8 Since. "Forasmuch as" (OJPS). **[D]**

[D] See Rashbam's comment to 18:5.

KIMHI and old. The old men showed themselves to be as bad as the boys and the younger men. **All the people to the last man.** They were so evil that they had cut off all access to the town to prevent guests from passing through. So this was a new and unwelcome experience for them. It is a great mystery why these people were so evil. But all the details are given so that everyone on earth can acknowledge that what happened to them was justified.

5 That we may be intimate with them. Rather, "that we may know them" (OJPS)—who they are, and how they could possibly have dared to come here. In plain Hebrew, they were saying that they would kill them. Compare, from the "concubine in Gibeah" episode, "they meant to kill me" (Judg. 20:5), which literally says, "they imagined to kill me." But some understand their expression to refer to homosexual intercourse.

6 Shut the door behind him. This is a possible translation; but the Hebrew phrasing also permits the interpretation, "he [someone inside the house] shut the door behind him."

7 I beg you, my friends, do not commit such a wrong. You are my brothers (compare OJPS), my neighbors—for my sake, please leave them alone.

8 Look. Rather than satisfy your lust to kill these men, take my daughters and satisfy your lust by raping them. **Do to them as you**

IBN EZRA 5 That we may be intimate with them. A euphemism for sex.

6 The door. The ת of the Hebrew word is a feminine ending, not a root letter; see the Hebrew of "the *door* of my lips" (Ps. 141:3).

8 Who have not known a man. Note that this form of the verb does not

NAHMANIDES 5 That we may be intimate with them. Their intent, as the Sages point out, was to make Sodom a town "forgotten by wayfarers" (Job 28:4). For they imagined that because their region was "like the garden of the LORD" (13:10) they would be overwhelmed with visitors. And they considered generosity despicable. But Lot, with all his wealth, came among them. Either he asked their permission or they accepted him out of respect for Abraham. The text makes clear their intent: "Only this was the sin of your sister Sodom: arrogance! She and her daughters had plenty of bread and untroubled tranquillity; yet she did not support the poor and the needy" (Ezek. 16:49). They were called "very wicked sinners against the LORD" (13:13) because of their rebellion against the Holy One (despite their "tranquillity") and their afflicting the needy: "In their haughtiness, they committed abomination before Me; and so I removed them, as you saw" (Ezek. 16:50). The traditional view is that they were evil in every respect, but that this sin of not supporting the poor—the sin they most frequently practiced—was what sealed their doom. All nations at least treat their neighbors, including the poor, decently; there was no other nation as cruel as Sodom. You must realize that the judgment of Sodom was also based on its being part of the land of Israel. "The LORD's possession" (2 Sam. 20:19) cannot tolerate people who "commit abomination." It would one day spew out all the Canaanites, but it could not wait to do so to this nation, the worst of them all, both to heaven and to humanity. The heavens and the earth were both appalled at them, and their own land was destroyed forever, because they were so proud of how good they had it. The Holy One saw that this would be "a lesson to rebels" (Num. 17:25) among the Israelites who would take possession of the land in the future, as indeed He warned them: "all its soil devastated by sulfur and salt, beyond sowing and producing, no grass growing in it, just like the upheaval of Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboiim, which the LORD overthrew in His fierce anger" (Deut. 29:22). There were other wicked, sinful people among the nations to whom He did nothing like this. But it all happened because of the high status of the land of Israel, where the Temple of the Lord was to be. I will clarify this matter of the special sanctity of the land of Israel further in my comments to Lev. 18:25, if the One who "deals death and gives life" (1 Sam. 2:6) gives life to me.

8 Let me bring them out to you. From praising this man we have made our way to condemning him. He worked so hard at being a

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS 5 That we may be intimate with them. If he had not offered them his daughters, I would think "that we may know them" (as OJPS literally translates) meant that they wanted to know whether they were spies or thieves. But the offer of his daughters makes clear they wanted to abuse the men (Bekhor Shor).

8 Who have not known a man. The idiom is that the man "knows" the woman, not vice versa. But Lot's daughters were very

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NJPS me bring them out to you, and you may do to them as you please; but do not do anything to these men, since they have come under the shelter of my roof." [9]But they said, "Stand back! The fellow," they said, "came here as an alien, and already he acts the ruler! Now we will deal worse with you than with them." And they pressed hard against the person of Lot, and

נָ֣א אֶתְהֶן֩ אֲלֵיכֶ֨ם וַעֲשׂ֜וּ לָהֶ֗ן כַּטּ֤וֹב בְּעֵינֵיכֶם֙ רַ֣ק לָאֲנָשִׁ֣ים הָאֵ֔ל אַל־תַּעֲשׂ֖וּ דָּבָ֑ר כִּי־עַל־כֵּ֥ן בָּ֙אוּ֙ בְּצֵ֣ל קֹרָתִ֔י׃ 9 וַיֹּ֣אמְר֔וּ גֶּשׁ־הָלְאָ֖ה וַיֹּ֣אמְר֑וּ הָאֶ֤חָד בָּא־לָגוּר֙ וַיִּשְׁפֹּ֣ט שָׁפ֔וֹט עַתָּ֥ה נָרַ֖ע לְךָ֣ מֵהֶ֑ם וַיִּפְצְר֣וּ

RASHI **come under the shelter of my roof.** I ask that (*ki*) out of respect for me you do this favor for those who have come under the shelter of my roof. — Literally (see Onkelos), "under the shadow of my [roof]beam."

9 Stand back! **[G]** Rather, "Approach." Their response to his offer of his daughters was comparatively mild. **The fellow . . . came here as an alien.** A foreigner. To his advocacy for the strangers they responded more threateningly: "You are advocating for these guests? How dare you! Don't forget that you are alone among us." **And already he acts the ruler!** Castigating us. **The door.** Which swings shut on hinges and can be locked.

[G] Our texts of Rashi's commentary incorporate a comment like that of Rashbam, apparently by Joseph Kara.

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ How could he act so contrary to human nature? The normal thing would be for a man to kill—or be killed—in order to protect his wife and daughters, but he offered to hand them over. ✦ What did the men of Sodom mean by saying, "Already he acts the ruler" (v. 9)? He was beseeching them, not ordering them around.

OJPS known man; let me, I pray you, bring them out unto you, and do ye to them as is good in your eyes; only unto these men do nothing; forasmuch as they are come under the shadow of my roof." [9]And they said: "Stand back." And they said: "This one fellow came in to sojourn, and he will needs play the judge; now will we deal worse with thee, than with them." And they pressed sore upon the man, even

RASHBAM **9 Stand back!** As in Isa. 65:5, where a similar idiom is used, what they are saying is, "Get out of our way!" **Came here as an alien.** Rather, he came "to sojourn" (OJPS), to live, in Sodom.

IBN EZRA distinguish between masculine and feminine. **These.** Saadia says that the shortened form of the word is used to hint at the third angel, who did not come to Sodom. But that is implausible. Both forms are translated the same way in the Aramaic.

KIMHI **please.** Or kill them if you must. **Since they have come under the shelter of my roof.** I would prefer that you rape my daughters or even kill them than do anything evil to my guests.

9 They pressed hard against the person of Lot. This follows the translation of Onkelos; in my reading, they "pressured" Lot verbally, shouting all sorts of curses and insults at him.

NAHMANIDES good host and protecting the guests who had taken shelter under his roof. But appeasing the townspeople by turning them loose on his daughters can only mean that he was an essentially evil person—one to whom sexual abuse of women meant little. He would certainly not have done this to his daughters if he thought it was a heinous crime. As tradition puts it, "Ordinarily a man would give up his own life to save his daughters and his wife—kill or be killed. But this one turned his daughters over to be abused. The Holy One said to him, 'Are you keeping them for yourself?'" Lot was afraid for his guests because he thought they were human men. But when they struck the townspeople with blinding light and told him the Holy One had sent them to destroy the town he recognized what they were and faithfully did everything they commanded him. You must understand that the story of the concubine in Gibeah, similar as it seems, is in no way as bad as this one. The Gibeonites were "a depraved lot" (Judg. 19:22) and just wanted to have sex with the man. They had no intention of keeping people away from their town. Once the concubine was brought out to them, they were satisfied. The old man who said to them "Look, here is my virgin daughter, and his concubine. Let me bring them out to you. Have your pleasure of them" (Judg. 19:24) knew that they would not want his daughter and would not do anything bad to her. That is why "the men would not listen to him" (Judg. 19:25). But when "the man seized his concubine and pushed her out to them" (Judg. 19:25), they left him alone. The old man and his guest were both willing to save the guest's life at the cost of his concubine. She was, after all, a concubine, not a married woman; and she had already "played the harlot against him" (Judg. 19:2). Nor were "all the people to the last man" (v. 4) involved in that incident as they were here in Sodom. As the man in that story said, it was "the lords of Gibeah" (Judg. 20:5), the leaders and the powerful men. That is why the others did not stop them. It was not even they who killed her (and they certainly had no intent to do so); she went back and "collapsed at the entrance of the man's house where her master was" (Judg. 19:26). She died there of exposure, no doubt because she was so weakened by the mass rape. As far as Torah law is concerned, the men of the town were not even liable to death. This was abuse, but not adultery or murder. But because their behavior was so similar to that of the men of Sodom, the rest of the Israelites attacked them, so that nothing even comparable should ever again be done: "Come, hand over those scoundrels in Gibeah so that we may put them to death and stamp out the evil from Israel" (Judg. 20:13). As we read on B. Yev. 90b, "A court may administer unauthorized penalties in order to make a fence for the Torah." **[J]** We have taken this opportunity because it enables us to explain an extremely obscure event and to describe what caused it.

9 And they pressed hard against the person of Lot. I have not found this Hebrew verb used anywhere except to mean "persuade." So we must interpret it here to mean that they urgently persuaded him to open the door for them. When he refused to do so, they **moved forward to break the door.** Or else he was standing in front of the door and would not let them get near it. They tried hard to persuade

[J] We omit the rest of Nahmanides' extensive discussion of the legal, historical, and theological issues that arise from the story in Judges 20.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS forward, as were the Midianite women, which is why Moses tells the Israelites in Num. 31:17 to "slay also every woman who has known a man" (Hizkuni). **Let me bring them out to you.** I do not agree with Nahmanides' view of the "concubine in Gibeah" story; see my commentary to the book of Judges. This is not the place to discuss it. In our story, Lot's plan was to have his daughters' fiancés, who were in the crowd, intervene to save them. While that was happening, the guests could escape (Abarbanel). **Since they have come under the shelter of my roof.** Rather, "that is why they have come under the shelter of my roof—to keep safe from you. Otherwise, they would have stayed at an inn." He was obligated by the law of hospitality to do everything he could to save them (Abarbanel).

9 The fellow came here as an alien, and already he acts the ruler! The Hebrew may mean, "[You are] the one person who has come here from outside and been appointed judge." For the language, compare OJPS; for the possible significance, see my next comment

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NJPS moved forward to break the door. 10But the men stretched out their hands and pulled Lot into the house with them, and shut the door. 11And the people who were at the entrance of the house, young and old, they struck with blinding light, so that they were helpless to find the entrance.

12Then the men said to Lot, "Whom else have you here? Sons-in-law, your sons and daughters, or anyone else that you have in the city—bring them out of the place. 13For we are about to destroy this place;

OJPS Lot, and drew near to break the door. 10But the men put forth their hand, and brought Lot into the house to them, and the door they shut. 11And they smote the men that were at the door of the house with blindness, both small and great; so that they wearied themselves to find the door.

12And the men said unto Lot: "Hast thou here any besides? son-in-law, and thy sons, and thy daughters, and whomsoever thou hast in the city; bring them out of the place; 13for we will destroy this place,

בָּאִישׁ בְּלוֹט מְאֹד וַיִּגְּשׁוּ לִשְׁבֹּר הַדָּלֶת׃
10 וַיִּשְׁלְחוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים אֶת־יָדָם וַיָּבִיאוּ אֶת־
לוֹט אֲלֵיהֶם הַבָּיְתָה וְאֶת־הַדֶּלֶת סָגָרוּ׃
11 וְאֶת־הָאֲנָשִׁים אֲשֶׁר־פֶּתַח הַבַּיִת הִכּוּ
בַּסַּנְוֵרִים מִקָּטֹן וְעַד־גָּדוֹל וַיִּלְאוּ לִמְצֹא
הַפָּתַח׃
12 וַיֹּאמְרוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים אֶל־לוֹט עֹד מִי־לְךָ
פֹּה חָתָן וּבָנֶיךָ וּבְנֹתֶיךָ וְכֹל אֲשֶׁר־לְךָ בָּעִיר
הוֹצֵא מִן־הַמָּקוֹם׃ 13 כִּי־מַשְׁחִתִים אֲנַחְנוּ

RASHI **11 The entrance of the house.** The open space through which one enters and exits. **Young and old.** The young men initiated the transgression (see v. 4), so the punishment started with them too. **With blinding light.** They were struck blind.

12 Whom else have you here? The straightforward sense of the question is, "Whom else do you have in this town besides your wife and daughters, who are in the house?" **Sons-in-law, your sons and daughters.** If you have any such, get them out of here. — "Sons" must refer to sons of his married daughters. **Anyone else that you have in the city.** Literally, "Do you have any more here [*poh*]?" (compare OJPS). But the Hebrew can also be read to say, "Do you still have a mouth [*peh*]?" He had been speaking in defense of the townspeople all night. They asked him, "After this outrage they are committing, do you still have a mouth to defend them?"

KIMHI **11 Blinding light.** Rather, "blindness"; the Hebrew word, *sanverim*, is a contraction of the phrase *sanei re'iyah* ("debased vision"). **[D]**

12 Whom else have you here? More precisely, "whom else do you have that is still here?" **Your sons.** That is, your grandchildren; Lot had no sons. If he had had sons, he would have spoken to them (as he does to his sons-in-law in v. 14). **Anyone else that you have in the city.** Rather, "all else"—any*thing* else you have: livestock, silver and gold, clothing. **Bring them out of the place.** Not just out of the city but out of the whole area.

13 The outcry against them. Literally, "the cry of them" (OJPS), but NJPS understands correctly. It is an objective genitive rather than a subjective genitive; the Hebrew construct form can represent either one. Contrast "your prayer" of Isa. 38:5, where "you"

[D] The precise meaning Kimhi intends is not clear.

NAHMANIDES him to get out of their way because they did not want to hurt him. That is why they told him, "Stand back!"

12 Sons-in-law, your sons and daughters. If Rashi's comment were correct, it would mean that the angels were speaking in human character—for Lot had no sons, only daughters (but see Ibn Ezra's comment). It could be that he had older, married sons, but that he spoke with his sons-in-law (see v. 14) first under the assumption that his own sons would heed his advice. But by the time his sons-in-law laughed at him they had spoken for so long that it was already dawn. The angels would not let him take anyone with him but those in the house. It is worth noting that Lot's own merit would have saved his sons, daughters, and sons-in-law. The Holy One would not (as Abraham thought) have killed the righteous along with the wicked. The angels obviously knew the divine intention when they did this. Even Zoar escaped due to Lot's prayer. But that may have been out of respect for his hospitality toward them. The polite thing would certainly be to rescue one's host and all that he had, as Joshua's spies did when they agreed to protect Rahab and all her family. **[K]** As Genesis Rabbah puts it, there was an exchange of favors.

[K] See Joshua 6.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS (Abarbanel). **Now we will deal worse with you than with them.** Like them, you are a guest among us—but you act as if you were at home here (Hizkuni). If my previous suggestion is correct, this would be a question: "Shall we treat you worse than we treat them?" (Abarbanel).

RASHBAM **11 With blinding light.** The Hebrew word implies that they were "stunned" with blindness. **They were helpless to find the entrance.** They could not find it and stopped trying. Compare "the Egyptians *will find it impossible* to drink the water of the Nile" (Exod. 7:18) once it is turned into blood. And Exod. 7:21 says plainly that they "could not" drink. In other places, the two verbs are parallel: "I *could not* hold it in, I *was helpless*" (Jer. 20:9); "when it has become apparent that Moab *has gained nothing* in the outdoor shrine, he shall come to pray in his temple—but *to no avail*" (Isa. 16:12).

12 Whom else have you here? Do you have any other relatives in town besides these that are in the house?

13 The LORD has sent us. The verb is not Qal (which would mean "sent" in the

IBN EZRA **11 Blinding light.** In the Hebrew this is a single word, but a quadriliteral, and in plural form as well. It is found also in the story of Elisha: "Please strike this people with a blinding light" (2 Kings 6:18). The plural indicates that not merely their eyes but also their minds were "blinded."

12 Then the men said to Lot. This is an argument against those who say that just one angel was sent to save Lot; both of them are speaking to him here. Moreover, in v. 13, they add that they (both) are "about to destroy this place." And the one angel who seems to be saving Lot in v. 21 is the very one who says, "I cannot do anything" (about destroying the city), in v. 22. **Whom else have you here?** They were not asking for information but saying, "If you have anyone else here . . ." **Sons-in-law, your sons and daughters.** That is, sons-in-law whom you treat as your own sons and daughters.

13 For we are about to destroy this place. This is just a manner of speaking, as

11 Blinding light. The Hebrew word with this meaning occurs only twice more, both times in 2 Kings 6:18 (Masorah). It not only blinded them, but confused them, which is why Elisha was able to lead the men who were "blinded" in 2 Kings 6:18 to Samaria, and why our men could not find the entrance; they went somewhere else instead (Bekhor Shor). Not "blinding light" but "cataracts" (Gersonides).

12 The men said to Lot. They had seen that the others were irredeemably evil and did not bother trying to change them (Gersonides). **Whom else have you here?** A rhetorical question. Now that you've seen what you just saw, whom else have you here? (Abarbanel).

13 For we are about to destroy this place. As with many other miraculous events, this could be performed on God's behalf by His

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NJPS because the outcry against them before the LORD has become so great that the LORD has sent us to destroy it." 14So Lot went out and spoke to his sons-in-law, who had married his daughters, and said, "Up, get out of this place, for the LORD is about to destroy the city." But he seemed to his sons-in-law as one who jests.

15As dawn broke, the angels urged Lot on, saying, "Up, take your wife and your two remaining daughters, lest you be swept away because of the iniquity of the city." 16Still he delayed. So the men seized his hand, and the hands of his wife and his two daughters—in the LORD's mercy on him—and brought him out and left him

אֶת־הַמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה כִּי־גָדְלָה צַעֲקָתָם אֶת־
פְּנֵי יְהוָה וַיְשַׁלְּחֵנוּ יְהוָה לְשַׁחֲתָהּ׃
14 וַיֵּצֵא לוֹט וַיְדַבֵּר | אֶל־חֲתָנָיו | לֹקְחֵי
בְנֹתָיו וַיֹּאמֶר קוּמוּ צְאוּ מִן־הַמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה
כִּי־מַשְׁחִית יְהוָה אֶת־הָעִיר וַיְהִי כִמְצַחֵק
בְּעֵינֵי חֲתָנָיו׃
15 וּכְמוֹ הַשַּׁחַר עָלָה וַיָּאִיצוּ הַמַּלְאָכִים
בְּלוֹט לֵאמֹר קוּם ׀ קַח אֶת־אִשְׁתְּךָ וְאֶת־
שְׁתֵּי בְנֹתֶיךָ הַנִּמְצָאֹת פֶּן־תִּסָּפֶה בַּעֲוֹן
הָעִיר׃ 16 וַיִּתְמַהְמָהּ | וַיַּחֲזִקוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים
בְּיָדוֹ וּבְיַד־אִשְׁתּוֹ וּבְיַד שְׁתֵּי בְנֹתָיו
בְּחֶמְלַת יְהוָה עָלָיו וַיּוֹצִאֻהוּ וַיַּנִּחֻהוּ מִחוּץ

OJPS because the cry of them is waxed great before the LORD; and the LORD hath sent us to destroy it." 14And Lot went out, and spoke unto his sons-in-law, who married his daughters, and said: "Up, get you out of this place; for the LORD will destroy the city." But he seemed unto his sons-in-law as one that jested.

15And when the morning arose, then the angels hastened Lot, saying: "Arise, take thy wife, and thy two daughters that are here; lest thou be swept away in the iniquity of the city." 16But he lingered; and the men laid hold upon his hand, and upon the hand of his wife, and upon the hand of his two daughters; the LORD being merciful unto him. And they brought him

RASHI **14 His sons-in-law**. He had two married daughters in town. **Who had married his daughters**. Rather, "and those who were to marry his daughters," the fiancés of the two daughters who were still living at home.

15 The angels urged Lot on. They "pressed" him, as Onkelos correctly explains it; but the meaning, of course, is that they "hastened" him (OJPS). **Your two remaining daughters**. Literally, your two daughters "that are here" (OJPS) in your house and can be saved. There are various midrashim about the somewhat unusual Hebrew word, but what I have said resolves the difficulty. **Lest you be swept away**. That is, completely destroyed. Onkelos translates the phrase "until the whole generation *had perished*" (in Num. 32:13 and Deut. 2:14) using this same root.

16 Still he delayed. He was trying to save his property. **So the men seized his hand**. Though only one of them was deputed to save him; see my next comment.

RASHBAM ordinary sense, expecting us to return) but Piel: "The Lord has turned us loose" to destroy. Compare "Wasting famine, ravaging plague, deadly pestilence, and fanged beasts will I *let loose* against them" (Deut. 32:24); "He *inflicted* upon them swarms of insects" (Ps. 78:45).

15 As dawn broke. Yet it was not until "the sun rose" that "Lot entered Zoar" (v. 23), showing how long the angels waited for him, out of God's love for Abraham.

IBN EZRA in "Moses and Aaron had performed all these marvels" (Exod. 11:10). It was really the Holy One who did them; the text connects them with Moses and Aaron because they were done *through* them.

14 Who had married his daughters. Lot had two other daughters who died in Sodom, as is proved by the angels' calling the other two his "remaining daughters" (v. 15).

15 As dawn broke. Literally, "and like dawn broke," which Jonah ibn Janah, the Spanish grammarian, says is impossible Hebrew. But he forgot "they shall increase like increasing" (Zech. 10:8), where the idiom is also found. **Urged**. This is a hollow verb; see "the taskmasters *pressed* them" (Exod. 5:13).

KIMHI are praying, to "the house of My prayer" (as Isa. 56:7 literally says), where He is the one being prayed to.

14 Lot went out and spoke to his sons-in-law, who had married his daughters. He did not speak to his daughters themselves, since women generally follow their husbands' opinions.

15 The angels. At this point the text returns to calling them "angels" rather than "men," since they are performing the kind of actions that angels perform.

16 Still he delayed. As if he were worried about the property he was leaving behind. For they had not let him take anything, despite having asked him about "all else that you have in the city" (v. 12). **So the men seized his hand**. Here they are once again acting like "men," as if they had material bodies. **In the LORD's mercy on him**. On Abraham.

16 Still he delayed. I am astounded by the claim of that Karaite Ben Ephraim, who claims that this verb *yitmahmah* is related to the question word *mah* ("what?"). He forgot the *mappiq* in the ה at the end of the verb, which clearly shows that it is a consonant, not a vowel letter as in the question word. This verb means to "delay" or "tarry," and comes from מהה with the מ repeated because it is in the Hitpael. **So the men seized his hand**. This clarifies that he was so frightened he did not have the strength to flee.

NAHMANIDES **16 The men seized his hand**. Ibn Ezra thinks Lot was weak with fear. Actually the verb is being used here as in "the Egyptians *urged* the people on, impatient to have them leave the country" (Exod. 12:33). They were dragging him by force, in a hurry to get him away. **In the LORD's mercy on him**. Rather than by his own merit. Alternatively, it may mean that they were in a hurry to get him out of town *while* the Lord's mercy was still on him, before the divine wrath could go forth and consume him as well.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS prophets. The purpose of the destruction was to make sure this kind of evil did not spread among the human race, preventing them from achieving the perfection for which they were created (Gersonides).

14 But he seemed to his sons-in-law as one who jests. They did not take him seriously; they thought he was out of his mind (Bekhor Shor). Like the others in town, they did not believe the words of the prophets, so they did not even try to flee (Gersonides).

15 As dawn broke, the angels urged Lot on. He could not leave until dawn; he would not have been able to see (Abarbanel).

16 The men seized his hand. He was not moving fast enough (Gersonides). The angel assigned to annihilate the city assisted the one who had been sent to save Lot, since he could not do it until Lot had left (Abarbanel). **In the LORD's mercy on him**. His delay after being warned by the angels should have let him too be swept away. But he did not delay rebelliously, just out of confusion and inertia (Sforno).

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NJPS outside the city. 17When they had brought them outside, one said, "Flee for your life! Do not look behind you, nor stop anywhere in the Plain; flee to the hills, lest you be swept away." 18But Lot said to them, "Oh no,

OJPS forth, and set him without the city. 17And it came to pass, when they had brought them forth abroad, that he said: "Escape for thy life; look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the Plain; escape to the mountain, lest thou be swept away." 18And Lot said unto

לָעִיר׃ 17 וַיְהִי֙ כְּהוֹצִיאָ֣ם אֹתָ֔ם הַחֽוּצָה
וַיֹּ֕אמֶר הִמָּלֵ֖ט עַל־נַפְשֶׁ֑ךָ אַל־תַּבִּ֤יט
אַחֲרֶ֙יךָ֙ וְאַל־תַּעֲמֹ֣ד בְּכָל־הַכִּכָּ֔ר הָהָ֖רָה
הִמָּלֵ֥ט פֶּן־תִּסָּפֶֽה׃ 18 וַיֹּ֥אמֶר לוֹט֙ אֲלֵהֶ֔ם

RASHI **17 One said.** The angels did not both say this because only one of them was supposed to save him; the other was to destroy the city. **Flee for your life!** Forget about your property; you are lucky to be saving your lives. The verb literally means, "Deliver yourself!" as in "Before she labored, she was delivered; before her pangs came, she *bore* a son" (Isa. 66:7); "We are like a bird *escaped* from the fowler's trap; the trap broke and we *escaped*" (Ps. 124:7). **Do not look behind you.** You have participated in their wickedness, but you are being saved by virtue of your relationship with Abraham. It is not right for you to watch them being punished when you yourself are escaping. **Anywhere in the Plain.** The Plain of the Jordan. **Flee to the hills.** Where Abraham is living: "he moved on to the hill country" (12:8) and is still living in "the place where his tent had been formerly" (13:3). Even though 13:8 says that Abram pitched his tent "at the terebinths of Mamre, which are in Hebron," you must remember that he had a huge number of tents, which stretched that far.

18 Oh no! Rather, "please, no!"—please do not ask me to escape to the hills. **My lord.** Since in v. 19 he acknowledges that this being is saving his life, our Sages understand Lot to be saying "LORD." Who else has the power to take life or to save it? And Onkelos translates it that way explicitly.

RASHBAM **17 Do not look behind you.** Out of grief for your sons-in-law who are still in the city. — Moreover, looking behind would have slowed him up. Besides, one should not look at angels and their deeds unless it is absolutely necessary. As Manoah told his wife, "We shall surely die, for we have seen a divine being" (Judg. 13:22). Jacob too said, "I have seen a divine being face to face, yet my life has been preserved" (32:31).

IBN EZRA **17 When they had brought them outside.** Unlike "to bring them out of the land of Egypt" (Exod. 12:42), the suffix on the infinitive of the Hebrew phrase is not objective, but subjective, representing not "them" but "they," the angels. **Do not look behind you.** Any of you, though it is phrased in the masculine singular; see similarly "you must not eat of it" (2:17).

18 Oh no. Samuel ha-Nagid of blessed memory says that *al* ("no") is related to *hoalti*; it is an imperative meaning "be willing." That is, Lot would be saying "please" (18:27), as did Abraham. But in my opinion it is simply a variant of the standard word for "no," *lo*. The translations are correct. **My lord!** Again, this is not a divine "Lord" but a secular "my lords," the equivalent of "sirs." It has the vowel of the divine name, but in this case the longer vowel is simply because it is a pausal form, occurring at the end of the verse, and need not be shortened as it normally is.

KIMHI **17 When they had brought them outside.** Rather, "while they were still bringing them outside." **Do not look behind you.** They did not want them looking back to see whether the city had been annihilated; this would have delayed their escape. **Lest you be swept away.** Once the destruction begins, we will not able to save you. It will take just an instant: "Sodom . . . was overthrown in a moment" (Lam. 4:6).

18 My lord. The interpretation according to which Lot is saying "LORD" **[E]** is questionable. The text says in plain Hebrew that he spoke "to them." As for the power to take life or to save it, angels certainly have this power when they are on a mission from God. For that matter, even prophets do—see Elijah and Elisha. **[F]**

[E] See Rashi's comment. **[F]** For Elijah, see 1 Kings 18:40 and 1 Kings 18:17–24; for Elisha, 2 Kings 2:23–24 and 2 Kings 4:32–37.

NAHMANIDES **17 Do not look behind you, nor stop anywhere in the Plain; flee to the hills.** The text must be understood this way: Do not stop anywhere in the Plain; flee to the hills. And once you are safe, do not look behind you. As v. 22 tells us, the catastrophe could not strike the cities until Lot reached the hills. When Lot said, "I cannot flee to the hills, lest the disaster overtake me—in the Plain—and I die" (v. 19), he was warned that they would not give him enough time to flee. For they kept telling him to hurry. Ibn Ezra's explanation of "do not look behind you" is unnecessary; this was not a command that they would be punished for violating. The angel was warning Lot, on his own initiative and again due to Lot's own merit, that he would be punished for looking behind him. Anyone else who "had taken the warning would also have saved his life" (Ezek. 33:5). Rashi explains why they were forbidden to look. But there was something else involved as well. Seeing the air filled with plague and contagious disease would be harmful—it would infect them too. Even thinking about such things is harmful. That is why "the person with a leprous affection" must "dwell apart" (Lev. 13:45–46). The same is true for those who are bitten by a wild dog or other animal. When they see water or anything else that reflects, they see an image of the animal that harmed them and they die (see B. Yoma 84a and the scientific literature). That is why Lot's wife "turned into a pillar of salt" (v. 26)—when she saw the "sulfur and salt" (Deut. 29:22) that came down on them from heaven, the destruction came into her mind and seized hold of her. I am tempted to say that when the Holy One destroyed these cities the destroying angel was visible as a blazing fire, "standing between heaven and earth" (1 Chron. 21:16) like the angel that David saw. That could be why they were told not to look. Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer says that Lot's wife looked back to see whether her married daughters were following her and laid eyes on the Shekhinah's back.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **17 One said.** Once they were out of town, only the angel who had been sent to save him remained (Abarbanel). **Do not look behind you.** The cloud of sulfur and fire is on its way—if it catches up with you, you are dead (Bekhor Shor). I don't see how what Nahmanides says could be correct. The men of Zoar certainly looked at the destruction, and nothing happened to them. And this was not a natural plague, of the kind that could be contagious. There was nothing wrong with looking. The expression meant, "Forget about the past. You are leaving it behind" (Abarbanel).

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NJPS my lord! 19You have been so gracious to your servant, and have already shown me so much kindness in order to save my life; but I cannot flee to the hills, lest the disaster overtake me and I die. 20Look, that town there is near enough to flee to; it is such a little place! Let me flee there—it is such a little place—and let my life be saved." 21He replied, "Very well, I will grant you this favor too, and I will not annihilate the town of which you have spoken. 22Hurry, flee there, for I cannot do anything until you arrive there." Hence the town came to be called Zoar.

אַל־נָא אֲדֹנָי׃ 19 הִנֵּה־נָא מָצָא עַבְדְּךָ חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ וַתַּגְדֵּל חַסְדְּךָ אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתָ עִמָּדִי לְהַחֲיוֹת אֶת־נַפְשִׁי וְאָנֹכִי לֹא אוּכַל לְהִמָּלֵט הָהָרָה פֶּן־תִּדְבָּקַנִי הָרָעָה וָמַתִּי׃ 20 הִנֵּה־נָא הָעִיר הַזֹּאת קְרֹבָה לָנוּס שָׁמָּה וְהִיא מִצְעָר אִמָּלְטָה נָּא שָׁמָּה הֲלֹא מִצְעָר הִוא וּתְחִי נַפְשִׁי׃ 21 וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו הִנֵּה נָשָׂאתִי פָנֶיךָ גַּם לַדָּבָר הַזֶּה לְבִלְתִּי הָפְכִּי אֶת־הָעִיר אֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתָּ׃ 22 מַהֵר הִמָּלֵט שָׁמָּה כִּי לֹא אוּכַל לַעֲשׂוֹת דָּבָר עַד־בֹּאֲךָ שָׁמָּה עַל־כֵּן קָרָא שֵׁם־הָעִיר צוֹעַר׃

OJPS them: "Oh, not so, my lord; 19behold now, thy servant hath found grace in thy sight, and thou hast magnified thy mercy, which thou hast shown unto me in saving my life; and I cannot escape to the mountain, lest the evil overtake me, and I die. 20Behold now, this city is near to flee unto, and it is a little one; oh, let me escape thither—is it not a little one?—and my soul shall live." 21And he said unto him: "See, I have accepted thee concerning this thing also, that I will not overthrow the city of which thou hast spoken. 22Hasten thou, escape thither; for I cannot do any thing till thou be come thither."—Therefore the name of the city was called Zoar.—

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ How could the angel possibly "grant [Lot] this favor" and "not annihilate the town of which you have spoken" (v. 21)? He should have simply arranged for Lot to flee to the hills rather than decide not to annihilate a town whose destruction had been ordered by the Holy One. ✦ Why could the angel "not do anything until you arrive there" (v. 22)? Couldn't he have destroyed Sodom as soon as Lot left the town?

RASHI **19 Lest the disaster overtake me.** When I was with the people of Sodom, the Holy One saw my deeds and those of the townspeople, and I appeared to be righteous and worth saving. But when I am with Abraham the righteous, I will appear wicked. — The woman of Zarephath said the same thing to Elijah: "What harm have I done you, O man of God, that you should come here to recall my sin and cause the death of my son?" (1 Kings 17:18). Before you arrived, the Holy One considered me righteous in comparison to my neighbors. But in comparison to you I look wicked.

20 That town there is near enough. It is "near" in the sense of being nearly (that is, newly) settled, so its seah, its measure of punishment, cannot yet be full. — It had been settled by some of the generation of the Dispersion. This would have occurred in the year that Peleg died, just 52 years previously. For Peleg died when Abraham was 48 years old: "After the birth of Reu, Peleg lived 209 years" (11:19). We must begin by subtracting 32, since "when Reu had lived 32 years, he begot Serug" (11:20) and another 30 because "when Serug had lived 30 years, he begot Nahor" (11:22). That makes 62. "When Nahor had lived 29 years, he begot Terah" (11:24), making 91, and "when Terah had lived 70 years, he begot Abram" (11:26), for a total of 161. So there were 48 years remaining to Peleg after the birth of Abraham. That very year was the year of the Dispersion. Since Sodom was annihilated when Abraham was 99—that is, in his 100th year—the Dispersion had occurred 52 years before. Zoar was actually founded a year after Sodom and the others. That is why Lot said, "Behold now" (OJPS)—really "behold, please"; "please" in Hebrew is נא, which has a numerical value of 51. **It is such a little place!** Its sins are still few, and you can leave it alone. **And let my life be saved.** In that place. All this is midrashic. The straightforward sense is simply, "It is a small place with very few people, and you need not worry about leaving it alone and letting me live there."

21 I will grant you this favor too. Since it is not enough for you that I am saving your life, I will save the lives of that whole town for your sake. **I will not annihilate the town.** The Hebrew idiom is "I am not annihilating the town."

22 I cannot do anything until you arrive there. This was the angels' punishment for saying, "We are about to destroy this place" (v. 13)—as if it were their own doing. So they could not even leave the town until they were forced to admit, "I cannot do anything." It is in the singular to teach us that one's job was to annihilate the towns and one's was to save Lot. For two angels are never sent on a single mission. **Hence the town came to be called Zoar.** Because it was "a little place" (*miz'ar*).

RASHBAM **20 It is such a little place!** It has so few people that you can easily leave it alone for now; there are not that many sinners in it.

IBN EZRA **19 Your servant.** In v. 18 he addressed them both; here he speaks in the singular, to the one who seemed to be in charge. (There are in fact ranks among the angels.) **I die.** Note that the ת that ends the root and the ת that begins the affix have assimilated into a single ת with the combination indicated by a *dagesh*. The same phenomenon occurs in the Hebrew of "you may *cut* them down" (Deut. 20:20).

20 Such a little place! The adjective "little" here is related to the more common one meaning "young," though it does not have the feminine ending one expects. Still, neither does "Royal princesses are your favorites; the *consort* stands at your right hand" (Ps. 45:10).

KIMHI **19 I cannot flee to the hills.** I cannot go any faster. — Lot is once again addressing only the one who did the talking and therefore obviously outranked his colleague. But both angels were involved in saving him and both were involved in annihilating the city, as is obvious from the angel's reply.

20 It is such a little place. He repeats this, begging them to save it.

21 Very well, I will grant you this favor too. Evidently when the Holy One sends angels on a mission, He gives them a certain amount of latitude in performing it as seems best to them when they see and understand the situation. They are rational creatures, after all.

22 I cannot do anything until you arrive there. I was ordered not to annihilate the city until you were safe. **Hence the town came to be called Zoar.** Previously it had been called "Bela" (14:2).

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **19 You have been so gracious to your servant.** At this point, Lot is so frightened that he begins to pray to the Holy One (Bekhor Shor). That is why the previous verse stops where it does (Hizkuni).

21 I will not annihilate the town of which you have spoken. Possibly their ways were not as evil as those in the other towns (Gersonides). When Lot arrived, there would be 10 righteous men there, and that would be enough to save them (Abarbanel).

22 I cannot do anything until you arrive there. The Holy One is speaking to Lot in human terms; of course, He can do whatever He wants (Bekhor Shor). He meant: I cannot give the signal to the angel who is to annihilate the city (Abarbanel).

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NJPS [23]As the sun rose upon the earth and Lot entered Zoar, [24]the LORD rained upon Sodom and Gomorrah sulfurous fire from the LORD out of heaven. [25]He annihilated those cities and the entire Plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities and the vegetation of the ground. [26]Lot's wife looked back, and she thereupon turned into a pillar of salt.

OJPS [23]The sun was risen upon the earth when Lot came unto Zoar. [24]Then the LORD caused to rain upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the LORD out of heaven; [25]and He overthrew those cities, and all the Plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and that which grew upon the ground. [26]But his wife looked back from behind him, and she became a pillar of salt.

23 הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ יָצָא* עַל־הָאָרֶץ וְלוֹט בָּא
צֹעַרָה׃ 24 וַיהוָה הִמְטִיר עַל־סְדֹם וְעַל־
עֲמֹרָה גָּפְרִית וָאֵשׁ מֵאֵת יְהוָה מִן־
הַשָּׁמָיִם׃ 25 וַיַּהֲפֹךְ אֶת־הֶעָרִים הָאֵל וְאֵת
כָּל־הַכִּכָּר וְאֵת כָּל־יֹשְׁבֵי הֶעָרִים וְצֶמַח
הָאֲדָמָה׃ 26 וַתַּבֵּט אִשְׁתּוֹ מֵאַחֲרָיו וַתְּהִי
נְצִיב מֶלַח׃

v. 23. סבירין ומטעין "יצאה"

RASHI **24 The LORD.** Literally, *"and* the Lord." The extra *and* in such expressions always means "the Lord and His court." It all happened "as dawn broke" (v. 15), when moon and sun were both visible in the sky. For some of them worshiped the sun and others the moon. The Holy One reasoned, "If I punish them during the day, the moon worshipers will say, 'Had it happened at night, when the moon rules, we would never have been destroyed.' But if I punish them at night, the sun worshipers will say, 'Had it happened during the day, when the sun rules, we would never have been destroyed.'" **Rained upon Sodom and Gomorrah sulfurous fire.** It started out as rain and became sulfurous fire. **From the LORD.** It is a common feature of biblical style to repeat the noun rather than use a pronoun, even to the extent of having characters speak of themselves in the third person, as when Lamech says, "O wives of Lamech" (4:23), or when David says, "Take with you the servants of your lord" (1 Kings 1:33), instead of "my servants." Ahasuerus too tells Esther and Mordecai to write "in the name of the king" and to "seal it with the king's ring" (Esther 8:8). So our verse says "from the LORD" rather than "from Him." **Out of heaven.** As Elihu says, "By these things He controls peoples; He gives food in abundance" (Job 36:31). When He wants to punish His creatures, He brings fire down out of heaven on them, as He did onto Sodom. When He wishes to feed them, He likewise announces that He will "rain down bread for you out of heaven" (Exod. 16:4).

25 He annihilated those cities. Literally, He "overthrew" them (OJPS). All four towns **[H]** were on a single mountain, which He turned upside down: "He sets his hand against the flinty rock and overturns mountains by the roots" (Job 28:9).

26 Lot's wife looked back. More precisely, she "looked behind him" (compare OJPS). She looked behind Lot. **She thereupon turned into a pillar of salt.** She sinned with salt and with salt she was punished. Lot said to her, "Give these guests a bit of salt." She replied, "You're trying to start that terrible custom in this place, too?"

[H] Admah and Zeboiim (10:19) are understood to have been destroyed at the same time; see Deut. 29:22.

RASHBAM **24 The LORD rained upon Sodom and Gomorrah.** That is, the angel Gabriel did so. **From the LORD.** The actual Lord. This is how it is explained in Genesis Rabbah and in the Tanhuma.

IBN EZRA **24 From the LORD.** A repetition of "the Lord" (rather than simply "Him") for stylistic reasons. Check Num. 8:19 and you will find "the Israelites" occurring five times! **[F]**

25 The vegetation of the ground. All the trees were burnt.

26 A pillar of salt. Her bones were burnt with "sulfurous fire"; remember the land that is threatened with being "devastated by sulfur *and salt* . . . just like the upheaval of Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboiim, which the LORD overthrew in His fierce anger" (Deut. 29:22; this verse also demonstrates that Zoar escaped the devastation).

[F] Ibn Ezra merely says there is such a verse; he does not identify it.

KIMHI **24 The LORD.** That is, the angel, once again being called by his master's name. **From the LORD.** That is, from heaven. **Out of heaven.** That is, "from the sky." It was coming from high in the air.

25 He annihilated those cities. Literally, He "overthrew" them (OJPS), turned them upside down, from good, fertile soil, with gold and precious stones in abundance, to a land blasted with "sulfurous fire" (v. 24). **[G]**

26 Lot's wife looked back. She was following behind him but, being of little faith, looked back to see whether the city had really been annihilated or not, even though she had heard the angel's warning. **She thereupon turned into a pillar of salt.** As had all the inhabitants of those cities, some into pillars of salt and some into pillars of sulfur.

[G] Kimhi's comment quotes extensively from Job 28:1–8.

NAHMANIDES **24 The LORD rained upon Sodom and Gomorrah sulfurous fire from the LORD out of heaven.** I am surprised at Rashi's comments here. He has combined incompatible opinions from various midrashim as if the two were mutually coherent. In fact, there are *three* rabbinic opinions: (1) that the first "Lord" refers to Gabriel and the second to the Holy One; (2) that "and the Lord" includes the heavenly court; and (3) that the repetition of "Lord" in this verse is simply a linguistic feature (for the details of the dispute, see Genesis Rabbah). If you have understood my comment to "the LORD came down" (11:5), you will understand what they meant by "the heavenly court," and the straightforward sense will be obvious to you. For other cases where the Holy One refers to Himself in the third person and the divine name is not replaced by a pronoun, see (e.g.) 18:19 and v. 29 here.

26 Lot's wife looked back. Literally, she looked "behind him" (OJPS). He was at the rear, keeping them all ahead of him and hurrying them along.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **24 The LORD rained upon Sodom and Gomorrah sulfurous fire.** That is, actual rain accompanied by sulfurous fire that has risen from the earth with the mist, a phenomenon that we do find occurring from time to time (Gersonides). The fact that "the sun rose" (v. 23) tells us that this was not ordinary rain, of the kind that falls from clouds (Abarbanel). **From the LORD out of heaven.** This was not natural sulfur and fire coming from underground (Abarbanel).

26 She thereupon turned into a pillar of salt. There fell on her a large pile of salt, which does not look as if a woman is covered up underneath it. That is the straightforward sense. Somehow everyone thinks her body was *turned into* salt, and they claim it is still visible there (Bekhor Shor). Another reading: *It*, the land, had become a heap of salt (Hizkuni). We cannot agree that *she* turned into a pillar of salt; the Holy One performs miracles only to instill fear and awe in people, and there was no one around to see this one

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NJPS 27Next morning, Abraham hurried to the place where he had stood before the LORD, 28and, looking down toward Sodom and Gomorrah and all the land of the Plain, he saw the smoke of the land rising like the smoke of a kiln.

29Thus it was that, when God destroyed the cities of the Plain and annihilated the cities where Lot dwelt, God was mindful of Abraham and removed Lot from the midst of the upheaval.

30Lot went up from Zoar and settled in the hill country with his two daughters, for he was afraid to dwell in Zoar; and he and

27 וַיַּשְׁכֵּם אַבְרָהָם בַּבֹּקֶר אֶל־הַמָּקוֹם
אֲשֶׁר־עָמַד שָׁם אֶת־פְּנֵי יְהוָה׃ 28 וַיַּשְׁקֵף
עַל־פְּנֵי סְדֹם וַעֲמֹרָה וְעַל־כָּל־פְּנֵי אֶרֶץ
הַכִּכָּר וַיַּרְא וְהִנֵּה עָלָה קִיטֹר הָאָרֶץ
כְּקִיטֹר הַכִּבְשָׁן׃
29 וַיְהִי בְּשַׁחֵת אֱלֹהִים אֶת־עָרֵי הַכִּכָּר
וַיִּזְכֹּר אֱלֹהִים אֶת־אַבְרָהָם וַיְשַׁלַּח אֶת־
לוֹט מִתּוֹךְ הַהֲפֵכָה בַּהֲפֹךְ אֶת־הֶעָרִים
אֲשֶׁר־יָשַׁב בָּהֶן לוֹט׃
30 וַיַּעַל לוֹט מִצֹּעַר וַיֵּשֶׁב בָּהָר וּשְׁתֵּי
בְנֹתָיו עִמּוֹ כִּי יָרֵא לָשֶׁבֶת בְּצֹעַר וַיֵּשֶׁב

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ How does "God was mindful of Abraham and removed Lot from the midst of the upheaval" (v. 29) fit with the story described in vv. 17–23?

RASHI **28 Smoke.** The Hebrew word refers to a column of smoke. **A kiln.** More precisely, "a limekiln," a pit dug into the ground in which stones are burnt to produce lime. That is what the Hebrew word refers to throughout the Torah.

29 God was mindful of Abraham and removed Lot from the midst of the upheaval. What does God's being mindful of Abraham have to do with Lot? He was mindful of the fact that Lot knew Sarah was Abraham's wife but said nothing when he heard Abraham say in Egypt that she was his sister. Lot kept Abraham safe and so God kept Lot safe.

30 For he was afraid to dwell in Zoar. Because it was so close to Sodom.

KIMHI **27 Next morning, Abraham hurried to the place where he had stood before the LORD.** The Sages connect the institution of morning prayer with this verse, since the essential prayer of each service is to be said standing. (This they derive from Ps. 106:30, where Phinehas "stood and prayed." They point out that Abraham "got up early" (OJPS) to teach people that they should rise and thank God for the light before they go off to work; since he returned to the same place where he had stood when the angels parted from him, they further note that people should have a fixed place for their prayer.

28 A kiln. It may be either a lime-kiln or one for firing pottery.

29 God was mindful of Abraham and removed Lot from the midst of the upheaval. That is why Abraham comes on the scene in vv. 27–28. Lot was righteous but not righteous enough to be saved from the destruction on his own. God was mindful enough of Abraham to let him know, as soon as he saw the destruction, that Lot had been saved. Note, however, that he was not saved "from the midst of the upheaval" but before it took place.

OJPS 27And Abraham got up early in the morning to the place where he had stood before the LORD. 28And he looked out toward Sodom and Gomorrah, and toward all the land of the Plain, and beheld, and, lo, the smoke of the land went up as the smoke of a furnace.

29And it came to pass, when God destroyed the cities of the Plain, that God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow, when He overthrew the cities in which Lot dwelt.

30And Lot went up out of Zoar, and dwelt in the mountain, and his two daughters with him; for he feared to dwell in Zoar; and he dwelt in a cave, he and

RASHBAM **28 Looking down toward Sodom and Gomorrah.** To see whether there had been righteous men there and they had escaped, or not.

30 For he was afraid to dwell in Zoar. The angel had left it alone only because Lot did not have enough time to escape to the hills. Now that he did have time, he fulfilled the angel's instructions to "flee to the hills" (v. 17) in case this city too was annihilated.

IBN EZRA **27 Next morning, Abraham hurried to the place.** The Hebrew literally says that he "got up early in the morning to the place" (OJPS), but it was certainly after the sun rose; Sodom was not destroyed during the night (see v. 23).

28 Smoke. A synonym of the standard word, related to the word for incense. **A kiln.** A place where there is a fire burning continuously.

29 The cities where Lot dwelt. In one of which he dwelt. Compare "Jephthah the Gileadite died and he was buried in the towns of Gilead" (Judg. 12:7); "on a donkey foaled by she-asses" (Zech. 9:9).

NAHMANIDES **29 God was mindful of Abraham and removed Lot from the midst of the upheaval.** God was mindful of the fact that when Abraham "went forth as the LORD had commanded him, Lot went with him" (12:4). He was loyal to Abraham and accompanied him wherever he went. So he deserved to be saved on Abraham's account; it was because of Abraham that he was living in Sodom at all. If not for Abraham, he would still be living in Haran with the rest of the family. It would be impossible for evil to befall someone for following Abraham when he went forth at the command of his Creator. This is also why Abraham took his life in his hands and "went in pursuit" of the kings (14:14) for Lot's sake.

30 For he was afraid to dwell in Zoar. Rashi's comment is mistaken. Lot was afraid because Zoar was one of the places that was originally scheduled to be destroyed. It was only because of Lot's prayer that the angel left it alone. For he could not make it to the hills on that same day. Lot assumed that the angel would not be patient with Zoar much longer now that he had plenty of time to escape to the hills. That is why his daughter said, "there is not a man on earth" (v. 31). She too thought that when her father left Zoar it had been destroyed.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS (Gersonides). Gersonides is mixed up again. She was "dwelling in the past," trying to salvage something from their lives in Sodom, and was caught up in the destruction with the others (Abarbanel).

27 Next morning, Abraham hurried to the place. The actual language here is difficult: "Abraham got up early in the morning to the place" (OJPS). It seems to me that he must have returned to the "level" that he had reached the previous day. In that kind of communion with the Holy One, he saw prophetically what had happened to Sodom. When he saw further that Lot had escaped, his mind was set at rest (Abarbanel).

30 Lot went up from Zoar and settled in the hill country. He may not have believed that Zoar would escape, as the prophet had told him (Gersonides). He did not want to go back to Abraham, who had already risked his life for him once, with his tail between his legs; he was so ashamed, he found it preferable to live in a cave (Abarbanel). **With his two daughters.** His wife had been caught in the destruction, looking back to see what would happen (Gersonides). He fooled them into thinking that Zoar had been destroyed, and that if they were to look outside they would die like their mother. Acting "like silly doves with no mind" (Hosea 7:11), they believed him (Abarbanel).

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NJPS his two daughters lived in a cave. 31And the older one said to the younger, "Our father is old, and there is not a man on earth to consort with us in the way of all the world. 32Come, let us make our father drink wine, and let us lie with him, that we may maintain life through our father." 33That night they made their father drink wine, and the older one went in and lay with her father; he did not know when she lay down or when she

OJPS his two daughters. 31And the first-born said unto the younger: "Our father is old, and there is not a man in the earth to come in unto us after the manner of all the earth. 32Come, let us make our father drink wine, and we will lie with him, that we may preserve seed of our father." 33And they made their father drink wine that night. And the first-born went in, and lay with her father; and he knew not when she lay down, nor when

בַּמְּעָרָה הוּא וּשְׁתֵּי בְנֹתָיו׃ 31 וַתֹּאמֶר הַבְּכִירָה אֶל־הַצְּעִירָה אָבִינוּ זָקֵן וְאִישׁ אֵין בָּאָרֶץ לָבוֹא עָלֵינוּ כְּדֶרֶךְ כָּל־הָאָרֶץ׃ 32 לְכָה נַשְׁקֶה אֶת־אָבִינוּ יַיִן וְנִשְׁכְּבָה עִמּוֹ וּנְחַיֶּה מֵאָבִינוּ זָרַע׃ 33 וַתַּשְׁקֶיןָ אֶת־אֲבִיהֶן יַיִן בַּלַּיְלָה הִוא וַתָּבֹא הַבְּכִירָה וַתִּשְׁכַּב אֶת־אָבִיהָ וְלֹא־יָדַע בְּשִׁכְבָהּ

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ What possessed Lot's daughters to imagine that "there is not a man on earth to consort with us in the way of all the world" (v. 31)? Why didn't they just marry some men from Zoar, which had not been annihilated?

RASHI **31 Our father is old.** And if not now, when? He might die or cease to be fertile. **And there is not a man on earth.** They thought the entire world had been destroyed, as it had at the time of the Flood (see Genesis Rabbah).

33 That night they made their father drink wine. Which had been put in the cave so that they might produce those two nations. **And lay with her father.** The younger is said to have lain merely with "him" (v. 35). The text was lenient with her, since she was put up to it by her sister. But with the older sister, who initiated this terrible promiscuity, the text disgraced her quite bluntly. **He did not know when she lay down or when she rose.** Note the dot over the ק, implying that he *did* know when "she rose." Yet he was not careful, the next night, not to drink. Said R. Levi: Whoever hungers for forbidden sex finds his hunger eventually fed on his own flesh and blood.

RASHBAM **31 There is not a man on earth.** They thought the entire rest of the world had been destroyed by a Flood of fire.

IBN EZRA **31 The older one said.** Literally, "the first-born" (OJPS). Perhaps the married daughters who died in Sodom were the daughters of a previous wife, who had died. **There is not a man on earth.** They thought the "sulfur and salt" (Deut. 29:22) had engulfed the entire world.

33 When she lay down. The unexpected vowel in the verb is found also in (e.g.) "When I *break* your staff of bread" (Lev. 26:26).

KIMHI **31 Our father is old.** There is no hope of him getting married again and having sons. If we die without children, he will have no descendants at all. **There is not a man on earth to consort with us in the way of all the world.** Most commentators say that they thought the entire world had been destroyed by fire, but this is implausible; they themselves had just left Zoar, which had not been destroyed, so they ought to have realized that the rest of the world hadn't either. And their father must have told them why Sodom and Gomorrah were annihilated. I prefer what I heard quoted in the name of Joseph Kara: "There is not a man on earth who will marry us. They will all say, 'Those women are what's left of the people who were annihilated. Better stay away from them.'"

32 Come. As we have already explained in our comment to 11:3, this word, originally a verb, eventually became simply an interjection. So the fact that it appears to be in masculine form here is irrelevant. **Let us make our father drink wine.** That is, "let's get him too drunk to know what is going on." God forbid that we imagine Abraham's nephew would have knowingly had sex with his daughters. In fact, this story teaches us that even those who did not have the Torah would distance themselves from this kind of behavior. The whole story is written merely to explain where the nations of Ammon and Moab came from, and why God gave them their lands—out of love for our father Abraham, the uncle of their ancestor Lot. Israel was forbidden to take the slightest bit of their land. **That we may maintain life through our father.** More literally, "that we may preserve seed of our father" (OJPS). One who leaves no "seed"—no offspring—is dead if he leaves nothing behind through which his name can be remembered.

33 That night. For the lack of the definite article which ordinarily would be expected on the adjective (here the demonstrative "that"), compare also the Hebrew of "the one lamb" (Num. 28:4); "the one column" (three times in 1 Sam. 13:17–18); and "the new cart" (2 Sam. 6:3). **Or when she rose.** If he had realized it when she rose, he would have castigated them for committing such an abomination. But he was still too drunk to notice even then.

NAHMANIDES **31 The older one said.** Ibn Ezra's explanation is unnecessary. NJPS understands correctly that the word simply refers to the older of the two sisters. Similarly the earliest produce of the year is referred to as "first fruits." When Isaiah says "the first-born of the poor shall graze" (Isa. 14:30), he means the poorest of them. So too Josh. 6:26 really refers to "the older one" and "the younger one."

32 That we may maintain life through our father. The Hebrew verb could as easily mean "we will," but the translations are correct in using "we may." Their thinking was: Let's do what we ought to, for God will be merciful and have us give birth to a male and a female, through whom the world can be repopulated. For "the world is rebuilt by loyalty" (Ps. 89:2). **[L]** God did not rescue us for no reason. — And they were modest enough that they did not want to simply tell their father to marry them (which is permissible to a Noahide). Or perhaps even in those generations this kind of behavior was considered filthy and was never done. Our tradition certainly excoriates Lot for this.

[L] B. Sanh. 58b connects this expression to Adam's not marrying his daughter but leaving her for Cain.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **31 Our father is old.** He does not have the energy to take us to another country (Sforno). **There is not a man on earth to consort with us in the way of all the world.** They thought all the men were homosexual like the ones they had seen in Sodom (Abarbanel). Rather, "there is not a man in the land"—in this country—"to consort with us in the way of all the world"—to make a respectable marriage with us (Sforno).

33 And lay with her father. Rashi's comment implies that she did wrong. Yet given that Ruth the Moabitess was the ancestor of David, while Naamah the Ammonitess, a descendant of the younger daughter, did not join the royal line until she married David's son Solomon, it would seem that the older daughter acted properly after all. But making her younger sister participate in the plan was not proper (Hizkuni). **When she rose.** There is a dot over the ו of the Hebrew word translated this way; the same word at the end of v. 35 has no dot (Masorah). See my comment to 18:9; he was partly aware when she rose. He was dozing but noticed something (Gersonides).

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NJPS rose. 34The next day the older one said to the younger, "See, I lay with Father last night; let us make him drink wine tonight also, and you go and lie with him, that we may maintain life through our father." 35That night also they made their father drink wine, and the younger one went and lay with him; he did not know when she lay down or when she rose.

36Thus the two daughters of Lot came to be with child by their father. 37The older one bore a son and named him Moab; he is the father of the Moabites of today. 38And the younger also bore a son, and she called him Ben-ammi; he is the father of the Ammonites of today.

20 Abraham journeyed from there to the region of the Negeb and settled between Kadesh and Shur. While he was

OJPS she arose. 34And it came to pass on the morrow, that the first-born said unto the younger: "Behold, I lay yesternight with my father. Let us make him drink wine this night also; and go thou in, and lie with him, that we may preserve seed of our father." 35And they made their father drink wine that night also. And the younger arose, and lay with him; and he knew not when she lay down, nor when she arose.

36Thus were both the daughters of Lot with child by their father. 37And the first-born bore a son, and called his name Moab—the same is the father of the Moabites unto this day. 38And the younger, she also bore a son, and called his name Ben-ammi—the same is the father of the children of Ammon unto this day.

20 And Abraham journeyed from thence toward the land of the South, and dwelt between Kadesh and Shur; and he

וּבְקוּמָהּ׃ 34 וַיְהִי מִמָּחֳרָת וַתֹּאמֶר הַבְּכִירָה אֶל־הַצְּעִירָה הֵן־שָׁכַבְתִּי אֶמֶשׁ אֶת־אָבִי נַשְׁקֶנּוּ יַיִן גַּם־הַלַּיְלָה וּבֹאִי שִׁכְבִי עִמּוֹ וּנְחַיֶּה מֵאָבִינוּ זָרַע׃ 35 וַתַּשְׁקֶיןָ גַּם בַּלַּיְלָה הַהוּא אֶת־אֲבִיהֶן יָיִן וַתָּקָם הַצְּעִירָה וַתִּשְׁכַּב עִמּוֹ וְלֹא־יָדַע בְּשִׁכְבָהּ וּבְקוּמָהּ׃ 36 וַתַּהֲרֶיןָ שְׁתֵּי בְנוֹת־לוֹט מֵאֲבִיהֶן׃ 37 וַתֵּלֶד הַבְּכִירָה בֵּן וַתִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ מוֹאָב הוּא אֲבִי־מוֹאָב עַד־הַיּוֹם׃ 38 וְהַצְּעִירָה גַּם־הִוא יָלְדָה בֵּן וַתִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ בֶּן־עַמִּי הוּא אֲבִי בְנֵי־עַמּוֹן עַד־הַיּוֹם׃ ס

כ וַיִּסַּע מִשָּׁם אַבְרָהָם אַרְצָה הַנֶּגֶב וַיֵּשֶׁב בֵּין־קָדֵשׁ וּבֵין שׁוּר וַיָּגָר בִּגְרָר׃

נקוד על ו׳ *v. 33.*

RASHI **36 Thus the two daughters of Lot came to be with child by their father.** Even though tradition says a woman does not get pregnant the first time she has sex, these women broke their own hymens and so were able to get pregnant the very first time.

37 Moab. "From father." Again, the text says explicitly what the less modest of the girls did.

38 Ben-ammi. "Son of my people." The younger daughter's child bears a more euphemistic name. She got her reward in the time of Moses, who was told, "Do not harass the Moabites or provoke them to war" (Deut. 2:9), whereas of the Ammonites he was warned not to "provoke them" *at all* (Deut. 2:19).

20;1 Abraham journeyed from there. When he saw that the cities had been destroyed and no one was passing by his tent any longer. Another reading: he wanted to distance himself from Lot and the rumor that he had had sex with his daughters.

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why did Abraham "journey" (v. 1) from where he had been living, comfortably and quietly among friends, to Gerar, where evidently he was completely unknown?

RASHBAM **37 Of today.** "Today" being the era of Moses. Every occurrence of the expression "today" or "to this day" (see OJPS) refers to the era of the person who wrote the words down.

IBN EZRA **37 Moab.** A dialect variation of *me-ab* ("from father"). **He is the father of the Moabites of today.** That is, "as of today" no other nation has merged with this one. Or perhaps it simply means that this is still known "to this day" (compare the more literal translation of OJPS).

KIMHI **36 Thus the two daughters of Lot came to be with child by their father.** "Thus," from precisely the instances just described. They did not go on sleeping with him, since their only purpose was to "preserve seed."

20:1 Abraham journeyed from there. From the terebinths of Mamre, where he had been dwelling. But the text does not tell us why he journeyed. This time, it was not because of famine; there was famine in the land in Abraham's time only once, as we learn from the story of Isaac: "There was a famine in the land—aside from the previous famine that had occurred in the days of Abraham" (26:1). Perhaps he journeyed to Philistia so that he could dwell in every part of the land that God had given him, now here, now there, in order to lay claim to it. For Philistia was part of the land of Canaan. **And settled between Kadesh and Shur. While he was sojourning in Gerar** . . . Gerar was the place where he settled; "settling" and "sojourning" mean the same thing. It is natural to change the language a bit when something is repeated. But it is possible that he settled somewhere else before sojourning in Gerar—in Beer-lahai or some place like that. For Beer-lahai is between Kadesh and Shur: "it is between Kadesh and Bered" (16:14), and Bered is Shur. **[H]**

[H] The Targum identifies Bered and Shur as the same place; Beer-lahai-roi was "on the road to Shur" (16:7).

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **35 When she rose.** The younger daughter got up quickly, while he was still sound asleep (Gersonides).

36 Thus the two daughters of Lot came to be with child by their father. The proper text of Rashi's comment is not ערותן, "their hymens," but עדותן, "their testimonies," the evidence of their virginity (Hizkuni).

37 The older one bore a son and named him Moab. By the time they gave birth, they had learned the truth from others. They gave the children names that would make clear they had not been wantonly promiscuous (Abarbanel). The names were to indicate that they had not gotten pregnant by someone unworthy (Sforno).

38 And the younger also bore a son. "Also" implying that her descendants too would be part of the dynasty of David via Rehoboam's mother, Naamah the Ammonitess (Hizkuni).

20:1 Abraham journeyed from there. Either the destruction of the cities had caused a famine, or he was embarrassed at what Lot had done in the aftermath—or both (Gersonides). One of his reasons for moving was that his name had been changed. In the old place, they would obviously have continued to call him by his old name. So as soon as he was healed of the circumcision, he moved (Abarbanel). **And settled between Kadesh and Shur.** Two big towns, where he could promote the worship of the Lord (Sforno).

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NJPS sojourning in Gerar, [2]Abraham said of Sarah his wife, "She is my sister." So King Abimelech of Gerar had Sarah brought to him. [3]But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night and said to him, "You are to die because of the woman that you have taken, for she is a married woman." [4]Now Abimelech had not approached her. He said, "O Lord, will You

OJPS sojourned in Gerar. [2]And Abraham said of Sarah his wife: "She is my sister." And Abimelech king of Gerar sent, and took Sarah. [3]But God came to Abimelech in a dream of the night, and said to him: "Behold, thou shalt die, because of the woman whom thou hast taken; for she is a man's wife." [4]Now Abimelech had not come near her; and he said: "Lord, wilt

[2] וַיֹּ֤אמֶר אַבְרָהָם֙ אֶל־שָׂרָ֣ה אִשְׁתּ֔וֹ אֲחֹ֥תִי
הִ֖וא וַיִּשְׁלַ֣ח אֲבִימֶ֣לֶךְ מֶ֔לֶךְ גְּרָ֖ר וַיִּקַּ֥ח
אֶת־שָׂרָֽה׃ [3] וַיָּבֹ֨א אֱלֹהִ֜ים אֶל־אֲבִימֶ֗לֶךְ
בַּחֲלוֹם֙ הַלָּ֔יְלָה וַיֹּ֣אמֶר לוֹ֮ הִנְּךָ֣ מֵת֮ עַל־
הָאִשָּׁה֒ אֲשֶׁר־לָקַ֣חְתָּ וְהִ֔וא בְּעֻלַ֖ת בָּֽעַל׃
[4] וַאֲבִימֶ֖לֶךְ לֹ֣א קָרַ֑ב אֵלֶ֣יהָ וַיֹּאמַ֗ר אֲדֹנָ֛י

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why did "King Abimelech of Gerar [have] Sarah brought to him" (v. 2)? She was 90 years old and she herself had pointed out in 18:21 that she was "withered." ✦ Why did the Holy One not "afflict [Abimelech] and his household with mighty plagues on account of Sarai" as He had done to Pharaoh in 12:17? ✦ Why did Abimelech—who as we see from what he did was "a ruler who listens to lies" (Prov. 29:12)—attain the level of a prophet (v. 3), just like the holy prophets of the Lord?

RASHI **2 Abraham said of Sarah his wife, "She is my sister."** This time, he did not ask her permission but said so despite her, and not for her own good. After all, it had gotten her taken to Pharaoh's palace the last time. **[I]** The Hebrew could be read to say that he said this "to" Sarah his wife, but *el* ("to") can often be used as if it were *al* ("referring to"). Compare the Hebrew of "*referring to* the capture of the Ark of God and *to* [the death of] her father-in-law and her husband" (1 Sam. 4:21).

4 Now Abimelech had not approached her. The angel prevented him (see v. 6). **O Lord, will You slay people even though innocent?** Is this indeed Your way, to destroy the other nations [see OJPS] for no reason? You did this to the generation of the Flood and to the generation of the Dispersion. I suppose You killed them for no reason, just as You intend to kill me.

[I] See ch. 12.

RASHBAM **20:4 Now Abimelech had not approached her.** This prepares us for the Holy One's saying "that was why I did not let you touch her" (v. 6).

IBN EZRA **20:2 Abraham said of Sarah his wife.** For the use of the preposition with this meaning, compare "It was this boy I prayed *for*" (1 Sam. 1:27). **So King Abimelech of Gerar had Sarah brought to him.** The Hebrew uses the same verb as when "the woman was *taken* into Pharaoh's palace" (12:15). But Abimelech was not afflicted with the same "mighty plagues" (12:17) that Pharaoh was, being a more righteous man than Pharaoh.

3 God came to Abimelech in a dream. The angel came to him in a dream, for Abraham's sake.

4 Will You slay people even though innocent? Not just "people" but a "nation" (OJPS). He was praying not only for himself and his household but also for his kingdom (see v. 9). Pay no attention to the dreamer of dreams who swaps words for one another and says that *goy* here means "a person," not "a nation." See my comment to "he shall not have the right to sell her to outsiders" (Exod. 21:8) for a somewhat longer discussion of this.

KIMHI **2 Abraham said of Sarah his wife, "She is my sister."** Apparently he had heard that the locals were bad people. Isaac said the same when he came to Gerar, and he did not say this in other places. So evidently they considered the men of Gerar a bad lot. As for this plan of turning one's wife loose so as not to be under threat of being killed, we have explained it in our comments to "If the Egyptians see you" (12:12). It is surprising that Sarah's beauty could still have made her so desirable even at age 90.

3 God came to Abimelech in a dream by night. The same is said of Laban in 31:24. For God appears to gentiles in prophetic dreams out of respect for the righteous. Pharaoh, however, was not worthy of such a dream even for that reason; instead, divine messengers were sent to him. **[I]** This is what Elihu was talking about when he said, "For God speaks once, even twice—though man does not perceive it—in a dream, a night vision, when deep sleep falls on men, while they slumber on their beds. Then He opens men's understanding, and by disciplining them leaves His signature" (Job 33:14–16). "Twice" refers to communication by means of dreams and by means of afflictions. **She is a married woman.** And so is forbidden to you. For this was forbidden as far back as Adam: "A man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, so that they become one flesh" (2:24; see my comment there). Apparently the Noahides treated this prohibition as even more serious than the one against murder, since they were quite willing to kill a man in order to take his wife but not to sleep with her while she was still married to him (though both were equally forbidden).

4 Now Abimelech had not approached her. By God's will, he had been prevented from feeling desire for her. **Will You slay people even though innocent?** If you kill me, you kill (as it were) my people too, for I am the king and I lead them justly. When I am gone, they are as if dead. [Note that Abimelech later tells Abraham that he has brought guilt "upon me *and my kingdom*" (v. 9).] Moreover, I am innocent. I understood her to be a single woman. I have done nothing to deserve death.

[I] The "mighty plagues" of 12:17.

NAHMANIDES **20:2 Abraham said of Sarah his wife, "She is my sister."** This occurred differently than in Egypt. In Egypt, "Pharaoh's courtiers saw her and praised her to Pharaoh" (12:15), because both the courtiers and the king were steeped in depravity. But this king was blameless and upright, and his courtiers were good men as well. Abraham was suspicious of them nonetheless and would tell everyone, "She is my sister." **So King Abimelech of Gerar had Sarah brought to him.** It is a wonder that Sarah, now that she was "withered" (18:12), was still so beautiful that kings would have her brought to them. When she was brought to Pharaoh, at perhaps age 65, her beauty might still have lingered. But once she was withered and "had stopped having periods" (18:11), it is a great wonder. Perhaps, as the Sages say, she had returned to her youthful looks when the angel gave her the news that she was to have a son.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **3 God came to Abimelech in a dream by night.** This was not a prophetic dream, but simply a "true dream" of the kind described by Maimonides in the *Guide* (Gersonides). As with Laban and Balaam, God did not "appear" to him as He did to the Patriarchs and the other prophets, but just "came" to him (Sforno). **You are to die.** Of the illness that has struck you—of which we are told in v. 18 (Sforno).

4 Will You slay people even though innocent? Will you slay an innocent people as you slew the guilty people of Sodom and Gomorrah? (Bekhor Shor). Another reading: If you slay a *goy* like me, will you slay Abraham the "innocent" as well? I only had her brought to me because of what he said (Hizkuni). With regard to his "nation" (OJPS), the Holy One must already have told him what we read in v. 7, "that you shall die, you and all that are yours" (Gersonides).

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NJPS slay people even though innocent? [5]He himself said to me, 'She is my sister!' And she also said, 'He is my brother.' When I did this, my heart was blameless and my hands were clean." [6]And God said to him in the dream, "I knew that you did this with a blameless heart, and so I kept you from sinning against Me. That was why I did not let you touch her. [7]Therefore, restore the man's wife—since he is a prophet, he will intercede for you—to save your life. If you fail to restore her, know that you shall die, you and all that are yours."

[8]Early next morning, Abimelech called

OJPS Thou slay even a righteous nation? [5]Said he not himself unto me: She is my sister? and she, even she herself said: He is my brother. In the simplicity of my heart and the innocency of my hands have I done this." [6]And God said unto him in the dream: "Yea, I know that in the simplicity of thy heart thou hast done this, and I also withheld thee from sinning against Me. Therefore suffered I thee not to touch her. [7]Now therefore restore the man's wife; for he is a prophet, and he shall pray for thee, and thou shalt live; and if thou restore her not, know thou that thou shalt surely die, thou, and all that are thine."

[8]And Abimelech rose early in the

הֲגַ֥וֹי גַּם־צַדִּ֖יק תַּהֲרֹֽג׃ [5] הֲלֹ֤א הוּא֙ אָמַ֣ר
לִ֔י אֲחֹ֥תִי הִ֖וא וְהִ֣יא־גַם־הִ֣וא אָמְרָ֣ה אָחִ֑י
בְּתֹ֥ם לְבָבִ֛י וּבְנִקְיֹ֥ן כַּפַּ֖י עָשִׂ֥יתִי זֹֽאת׃
[6] וַיֹּ֨אמֶר֙ אֵלָ֣יו הָאֱלֹהִ֔ים בַּחֲלֹ֕ם גַּ֖ם אָנֹכִ֑י
יָדַ֣עְתִּי כִּ֤י בְתֹם־לְבָבְךָ֙ עָשִׂ֣יתָ זֹּ֔את
וָאֶחְשֹׂ֥ךְ גַּם־אָנֹכִ֖י אוֹתְךָ֣ מֵחֲטֹ֑ו* עַל־כֵּ֥ן
לֹא־נְתַתִּ֖יךָ לִנְגֹּ֥עַ אֵלֶֽיהָ׃ [7] וְעַתָּ֕ה הָשֵׁ֖ב
אֵֽשֶׁת־הָאִ֑ישׁ כִּי־נָבִ֣יא הֽוּא וְיִתְפַּלֵּ֤ל בַּֽעַדְךָ֙
וֶֽחְיֵ֔ה וְאִם־אֵינְךָ֥ מֵשִׁ֖יב דַּ֣ע כִּי־מ֤וֹת תָּמ֙וּת֙
אַתָּ֔ה וְכָל־אֲשֶׁר־לָֽךְ׃
[8] וַיַּשְׁכֵּ֤ם אֲבִימֶ֙לֶךְ֙ בַּבֹּ֔קֶר וַיִּקְרָ֖א לְכָל־

ח׳ חסר א׳ *v. 6.*

RASHI **5 And she also said**. "Also" includes her slaves and her camel men and her donkey handlers. I asked all of them, and they also told me he was her brother. **My heart was blameless**. I did not imagine I was sinning. **And my hands were clean**. I am clean of sin, for I did not even touch her.

6 I knew that you did this with a blameless heart. It is true that you did not imagine (to start with) that you were sinning. But you get no credit for having "clean hands." **I did not let you touch her**. You are not the one who made sure you did not touch her. It was I who prevented you from sinning in this way, by not *giving* you the power to do so. — Note that the Hebrew literally says, "I did not *give* you to touch her." Compare the Hebrew of "God, however, would not *let* him do me harm" (31:7) and of "her father would not *let* him go in" (Judg. 15:1).

7 Restore the man's wife. Do not think that he will consider her disgraced and not take her back, or that he will hate you and not pray for you. **Since he is a prophet** and knows that you did not touch her, **he will intercede for you**.

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why did the Holy One not say to Abimelech, as He did to Laban in 31:24, "Beware of attempting anything" with Sarah, "good or bad"? Sarah would have been saved from danger and Abraham from shame. ✦ How could He threaten Abimelech, "You are to die because of the woman that you have taken, for she is a married woman," when (as v. 6 tells us) he did not touch Sarah? ✦ Why did Abimelech say, "O Lord, will You slay people even though innocent?" (v. 4), when the Lord had threatened to slay no one but him? Note that what he says in Hebrew is not "people" but "a nation" (OJPS). ✦ If Abimelech was indeed definitely "to die" (as threatened in v. 3), how can God subsequently say, "If you fail to restore her, know that you shall die" (v. 7)? ✦ Why should Abimelech care whether Abraham is "a prophet" or not? ✦ Since Abimelech did not touch Sarah, why must Abraham "intercede" for him?

RASHBAM **7 Since he is a prophet**. Rather, "he is fruitful" in terms of speech: *navi* in the sense of "prophet" but with respect to the "fruit" (*niv*) of his lips, as Isa. 57:19 puts it. "He is often with Me, he speaks My words, and I love his words and listen to his prayers." **He will intercede for you**. Abimelech desperately needed these prayers, as we see from v. 18.

IBN EZRA **6 Touch her**. Note that roots beginning with נ *can* drop the נ from the infinitive, but they *need* not do so. See Isa. 51:16 and Eccles. 3:2 for another such verb.

KIMHI **5 He himself said to me**. When I asked him. I did not rely on what I had heard from my courtiers. **And she also said**. I asked her too. **My heart was blameless**. Had I thought she was married, I would not have desired her even in my heart. **My hands were clean**. I treated her with complete respect.

6 I knew that you did this with a blameless heart. He says nothing about clean hands, since this was obvious to all. But only God knows what is in the heart. **I kept you from sinning against Me**. Again, all human beings, even non-Jews, are forbidden to commit adultery. Even if there had not been a specific commandment against it, the intellect teaches it, so it is as if the One who gave human beings rational thought prohibited them from doing anything evil. The violence one does against one's fellow man violates reason and diminishes good order in the world. **That was why I did not let you touch her**. He did not even let him hug and kiss her. Even though this was for Abraham and Sarah's sake, it might have been done differently; Abimelech might have been struck by plagues as was Pharaoh. But God knew that Abimelech's heart was innocent. Preventing Abimelech from desiring her was nowhere near as bad as what happened to Pharaoh; this is a temporary affliction. As for preventing the women of the household from giving birth, this too was temporary. It was to demonstrate to all that it was the finger of God at work and not mere chance.

7 He is a prophet. And therefore he is close to Me, and I am close to him, to heed his prayer. For you are still in need of forgiveness, though you acted innocently. Even if she was not his wife but his sister, you still did something wrong, by taking a woman without her consent—even a single woman. **You and all that are yours**. They all went along with you. Not one of them said, "Give her back."

8 Early next morning. He did not wait until the hour when kings normally rise, for his heart was agitated because of the dream. **The men were greatly frightened**. Since they had all gone along with him and even encouraged him to take her.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **5 And she also said**. "She" is one of the 11 times where the Hebrew word is spelled in the normal way, היא instead of the unusual הוא that is standard in the Torah (Masorah). I assumed that you said this out of fear until I asked her herself; I knew she was afraid of nothing (Bekhor Shor). **When I did this, my heart was blameless and my hands were clean**. "When I did this"—when I had her brought to the palace. But he claims no credit for not touching her, since in that he had no choice (Bekhor Shor). "When I did this"—when I made sure not to approach her (Hizkuni).

7 Therefore, restore the man's wife—since he is a prophet, he will intercede for you. The translations are not following the Hebrew punctuation: "Therefore, restore the man's wife, since he is a prophet. He will intercede for you." You can restore her; since he is a prophet, he will know that you did not approach her (Gersonides).

8 The men were greatly frightened. Said R. Abba: They could still see the smoke rising from Sodom. They said, "The angels who were sent there have come here!" (Hizkuni).

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NJPS his servants and told them all that had happened; and the men were greatly frightened. [9]Then Abimelech summoned Abraham and said to him, "What have you done to us? What wrong have I done that you should bring so great a guilt upon me and my kingdom? You have done to me things that ought not to be done. [10]What, then," Abimelech demanded of Abraham, "was your purpose in doing this thing?" [11]"I thought," said Abraham, "surely there is no fear of God in this place, and they will kill me because of my wife. [12]And besides, she is in truth my sister, my father's daughter though not my sister, and she became my wife.

עֲבָדָ֑יו וַיְדַבֵּ֣ר אֶת־כָּל־הַדְּבָרִ֣ים הָאֵ֔לֶּה בְּאָזְנֵיהֶ֖ם וַיִּירְא֥וּ הָאֲנָשִׁ֖ים מְאֹֽד׃ 9 וַיִּקְרָ֨א אֲבִימֶ֜לֶךְ לְאַבְרָהָ֗ם וַיֹּ֤אמֶר לוֹ֙ מֶה־עָשִׂ֣יתָ לָּ֔נוּ וּמֶה־חָטָ֥אתִי לָ֖ךְ כִּֽי־הֵבֵ֣אתָ עָלַ֣י וְעַל־מַמְלַכְתִּ֑י חֲטָאָ֤ה גְדֹלָה֙ מַעֲשִׂ֣ים אֲשֶׁ֣ר לֹא־יֵעָשׂ֔וּ עָשִׂ֖יתָ עִמָּדִֽי׃ 10 וַיֹּ֥אמֶר אֲבִימֶ֖לֶךְ אֶל־אַבְרָהָ֑ם מָ֥ה רָאִ֖יתָ כִּ֥י עָשִׂ֖יתָ אֶת־הַדָּבָ֥ר הַזֶּֽה׃ 11 וַיֹּ֤אמֶר אַבְרָהָם֙ כִּ֣י אָמַ֔רְתִּי רַ֥ק אֵֽין־יִרְאַ֥ת אֱלֹהִ֖ים בַּמָּק֣וֹם הַזֶּ֑ה וְהָרָג֥וּנִי עַל־דְּבַ֖ר אִשְׁתִּֽי׃ 12 וְגַם־אָמְנָ֣ה אֲחֹתִ֔י בַּת־אָבִ֖י הִ֣וא אַךְ֙ לֹ֣א

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ What makes Abraham think that "there is no fear of God in this place" (v. 11)? He said nothing of the kind to Pharaoh, despite how wicked the Egyptians were.

RASHI **9 Things that ought not to be done.** Rather, "things that are not [ordinarily] done." An extraordinary affliction has come upon us on account of you: blockage of the orifices of generation, of urination and excretion, and of the ears and the nose.

11 Surely there is no fear of God in this place. When a traveler comes to town, do they ask him whether he needs something to eat and drink, or do they ask about the woman who is with him, "Is she your wife or your sister?"

12 She is in truth my sister, my father's daughter. A non-Jew is permitted to sleep with his father's daughter, since fatherhood is uncertain among gentiles. Abraham wanted to make sure Abimelech understood that he had told the truth. Technically, Sarah was his brother's daughter, not his father's, but a grandchild can also be referred to as a child. In this way, Sarah actually was Terah's daughter. Note that in 13:8 Abraham says of his nephew Lot that they are "brothers." **Though not my mother's.** Haran, Sarah's father, had a different mother than did Abraham.

KIMHI **9 Abimelech summoned Abraham.** Rather, he "called" out to him (OJPS), to appease him and beg him to pray for him. **What wrong have I done?** Rather, "what wrong *had* I done against you" previously, for you to put me in danger of death? **Upon me and my kingdom.** For when I perish, my kingdom perishes (see again my remark at v. 4). **Things that ought not to be done.** They are not worthy of a man like you.

10 What . . . was your purpose in doing this thing? A man like you could not possibly have done this for no reason.

OJPS morning, and called all his servants, and told all these things in their ears; and the men were sore afraid. [9]Then Abimelech called Abraham, and said unto him: "What hast thou done unto us? and wherein have I sinned against thee, that thou hast brought on me and on my kingdom a great sin? thou hast done deeds unto me that ought not to be done." [10]And Abimelech said unto Abraham: "What sawest thou, that thou hast done this thing?" [11]And Abraham said: "Because I thought: Surely the fear of God is not in this place; and they will slay me for my wife's sake. [12]And moreover she is indeed my sister, the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother;

RASHBAM **12 My sister, my father's daughter.** One's grandchildren are one's "children" as well; she was the daughter of Haran, the son of Terah. **Though not my mother's.** So she is not literally my sister. She did not come forth from my own mother's womb, and is therefore permitted to me, **and she became my wife.**

IBN EZRA **9 What have you done to us?** The question word here is *meh* rather than *mah* because it is followed by a guttural letter. This is a standard rule.

12 My sister, my father's daughter. Some take "my father" here as an alternative way of saying "my grandfather," as when Jacob invokes the "God of my father Abraham" (32:10). But in my opinion Abraham is simply stretching the truth to get out of a tight situation. For other examples of this, see my comment to 27:19.

11 Surely there is no fear of God in this place. "Surely" is a mistranslation. What Abraham thought was, "This is a good land, *only* there is one thing wrong: there is no fear of God in this place."

12 My father's daughter though not my mother's. Haran, Sarah's father, was Terah's son by a different wife. If she had been descended from the same mother as well as the same father, Abraham never would have married her. It is always certain who the mother of the child is.

NAHMANIDES **11 Surely there is no fear of God in this place.** As there is not in most places in the world.

12 And besides, she is in truth my sister, my father's daughter though not my mother's. I do not know why Abraham is apologizing in this way. Even if she was his sister, he was still trying to mislead them by telling them so. He had sinned against them by bringing them into danger of committing such a great sin. There is no difference whatsoever whether what he said was true or false. But perhaps he was responding to Abimelech's asking him, "What was your purpose?"—that is, what made you think I was so wicked or sinful that you did this? I have not been in the habit of taking women from their husbands! Abraham replied, "I did not know you at all. Ever since I have been wandering through the various nations I have taken this precaution. I did not mention it when we first got here, because I saw no sign of transgression among you." Saying that it was actually true was a different argument: "I told you she was my sister because that is true, and I thought saying so would keep me safe. I assumed that if someone wanted her they would ask whether she

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **9 My kingdom.** This Hebrew combination occurs elsewhere only when David says "my kingdom" in 2 Sam. 3:28 (Masorah).

10 Abimelech demanded of Abraham. The Hebrew, both here and in v. 9, has merely "Abimelech said" to him (see OJPS). He spoke angrily in v. 9 but, seeing that Abraham was afraid, spoke kindly to him instead (Abarbanel). **What, then . . . was your purpose in doing this thing?** If you had played this trick on me with another woman, I would have assumed you were my enemy. But why would someone do this with his own wife? You would be destroying me at the cost of your own life (Bekhor Shor).

11 There is no fear of God in this place. Rather, "no fear of *elohim*," of the authorities. Remember that the Philistines were governed by "lords," not genuine kings. That is how Goliath could say (in 1 Sam. 17:8), "I am the Philistine, and you are Saul's servants" (Sforno).

12 She is in truth my sister, my father's daughter though not my mother's. That is, "she is my 'sister'—a relative of mine" (Bekhor Shor).

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NJPS my mother's; and she became my wife. 13So when God made me wander from my father's house, I said to her, 'Let this be the kindness that you shall do me: whatever place we come to, say there of me: He is my brother.'"

14Abimelech took sheep and oxen, and male and female slaves, and gave them to Abraham; and he restored his wife Sarah to him. 15And Abimelech said, "Here, my land is before you; settle wherever you

בַּת־אָבִי וַתְּהִי־לִי לְאִשָּׁה׃ 13 וַיְהִי כַּאֲשֶׁר
הִתְעוּ אֹתִי אֱלֹהִים מִבֵּית אָבִי וָאֹמַר לָהּ
זֶה חַסְדֵּךְ אֲשֶׁר תַּעֲשִׂי עִמָּדִי אֶל כָּל־
הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר נָבוֹא שָׁמָּה אִמְרִי־לִי אָחִי
הוּא׃
14 וַיִּקַּח אֲבִימֶלֶךְ צֹאן וּבָקָר וַעֲבָדִים
וּשְׁפָחוֹת וַיִּתֵּן לְאַבְרָהָם וַיָּשֶׁב לוֹ אֶת שָׂרָה
אִשְׁתּוֹ׃ 15 וַיֹּאמֶר אֲבִימֶלֶךְ הִנֵּה אַרְצִי

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why did Abimelech say, "Here, my land is before you; settle wherever you please" (v. 15), rather than expelling them as Pharaoh had done?

OJPS and so she became my wife. 13And it came to pass, when God caused me to wander from my father's house, that I said unto her: This is thy kindness which thou shalt show unto me; at every place whither we shall come, say of me: He is my brother."

14And Abimelech took sheep and oxen, and men-servants and women-servants, and gave them unto Abraham, and restored him Sarah his wife. 15And Abimelech said: "Behold, my land is before

RASHI **13 When God made me wander from my father's house.** Onkelos translated this in his own fashion. **[J]** But the difficulty in the Hebrew is properly resolved as follows: When the Holy One brought me forth from my father's house to wander here and there, I knew that I would pass through places where the people were wicked, so I asked her to say I was her brother. As for the verb "made me wander" being plural, do not be surprised; there are plenty of places where divinity and lordship are marked by the use of plural verbs and adjectives: "whom God *went* and redeemed as His people" (2 Sam. 7:23); "the *living* God" (Deut. 5:23 and elsewhere); "He is a *holy* God" (Josh. 24:19). And lordship, whether human or divine, is indicated by nouns of plural form: "Joseph's *master*" (39:20); "the man who is *lord* of the land" (42:33); "its *owner*" (Exod. 21:29 and 22:14); "*God* supreme and *Lord* supreme" (Deut. 10:17). As for the verb, it can mean "to err," but (as in English) this can idiomatically refer to someone who is in the "wrong" place, in that he has left his home but is not settled anywhere else: "Hagar . . . wandered about in the wilderness of Beer-sheba" (21:14); "I have *strayed* like a lost sheep" (Ps. 119:176; "And wander about without food" (Job 38:41). **Say there of me.** Again—this time with preposition *l-* rather than *el*—it is "say there *referring to* me." Compare the Hebrew of "the men of the place asked him *about* his wife" (26:7); "Pharaoh will say *of* the Israelites" (Exod. 14:3); "that they may not say *of* me" (Judg. 9:54).

14 And gave them to Abraham. To appease him and get him to intercede for him.

15 Here, my land is before you. Contrast Pharaoh, who said, "Here is your wife; take her and begone!" (12:19), being afraid of how steeped in perversity the Egyptians were.

[J] "The nations strayed after the work of their own hands, but the Lord brought me from my father's house near to His service." The difficulty in the verse is that the Hebrew can be understood to say that "the gods" led Abraham astray.

RASHBAM **13 When God made me wander.** When He exiled me from my home: "Go forth from your native land" (12:1). This is the sense of "My father was a fugitive Aramean" (Deut. 26:5) as well. The two verbs are used together in "I have *strayed* [= "wander" of our verse] like a *lost* [= "fugitive" of Deut. 26:5] sheep" (Ps. 119:176) and "My people were *lost* sheep: their shepherds led them *astray*" (Jer. 50:6).

IBN EZRA **13 When God made me wander.** Despite the plural verb, this indeed is "God" and not "the gods." Abraham is saying that he was "errant" in the sense of going from place to place without knowing where he might go next, as when Joseph was "wandering in the fields" (37:15). It has nothing to do with straying religiously; compare "Why, LORD, do You make us stray from Your ways" (Isa. 63:17). **[G] Say there of me.** Here too the preposition carries an unexpected meaning; but see "Pharaoh will say *of* the Israelites" (Exod. 14:3).

[G] It is not clear from Ibn Ezra's comment whether he thinks that verse uses "stray" with the same meaning as our verse or the opposite meaning.

KIMHI **13 When God made me wander from my father's house.** That is, "exiled me." For an exile travels on roads he does not know and is not used to. Abraham certainly used *elohim* here as "God," but he made the verb plural because he knew his listeners believed in "the gods." Nonetheless, we do sometimes find "God" used with the plural; see the Hebrew of "He is a holy God" (Josh. 24:19); "Let Israel rejoice in its maker" (Ps. 149:2); "God, my Maker" (Job 35:10). **Whatever place we come to.** He did not say this everywhere. We have only seen him do it in two places. What he told her was, "whenever we pass through a place where we need to." For if they stayed somewhere on a regular basis, the people knew him well and greatly respected him, like Aner and his brothers, who were "Abram's allies" (14:13). Remember what the Hittites told him: "You are the elect of God among us" (23:6).

14 Abimelech took sheep and oxen. He appeased him both with words and with gifts.

NAHMANIDES was also my wife. When your servants took her without asking, I decided this must also be a place where there was no fear of God, and I kept my mouth shut." But Ibn Ezra thinks he was simply putting Abimelech off.

13 So when God made me wander from my father's house, I said to her. Despite this, it is possible that he only made this agreement with her when they arrived in Egypt. Or he may have simply been reminding her there, as I suggested in my comment to "Please say that you are my sister" (12:13).

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **13 When God made me wander from my father's house.** Rather, "when the gods made me wander from my father's house." When they left the path of reason and began to worship other gods, I had to leave them and follow the path of life (Bekhor Shor). Rather, "when the judges" who ruled that land, Nimrod and his comrades, expelled me for having broken the idols and killed Amraphel and his allies (Hizkuni). Abraham is assuring Abimelech that he did not think Gerar was worse than anywhere else (Gersonides). When the "gods" I could not stand made me leave my father's house for I don't know where (Sforno).

14 Abimelech took sheep and oxen, and male and female slaves, and gave them to Abraham; and he restored his wife Sarah to him. Abraham's response convinced him that what he had been told in his dream had indeed come from God (Abarbanel).

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NJPS please." 16And to Sarah he said, "I herewith give your brother a thousand pieces of silver; this will serve you as vindication before all who are with you, and you

OJPS thee: dwell where it pleaseth thee." 16And unto Sarah he said: "Behold, I have given thy brother a thousand pieces of silver; behold, it is for thee a covering of the eyes to all that are with thee; and before all

לְפָנֶיךָ בַּטּוֹב בְּעֵינֶיךָ שֵׁב: 16 וּלְשָׂרָה אָמַר
הִנֵּה נָתַתִּי אֶלֶף כֶּסֶף לְאָחִיךְ הִנֵּה הוּא־
לָךְ כְּסוּת עֵינַיִם לְכֹל אֲשֶׁר אִתָּךְ וְאֵת כֹּל

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ How are we to understand what he says to Sarah in v. 16?

RASHI **16 And to Sarah he said.** Abimelech said this out of respect for her and to appease her. **Your brother.** As you told me he was. **This will serve you as vindication.** This wealth and the respect with which I am treating you. They will cover their eyes [compare OJPS] and will not belittle you. Had I returned you empty-handed, people might say, "He toyed with her for a while and then gave her back." But since I have spent so much to appease you, everyone will know that I was miraculously forced to return you. **You are cleared before everyone.** More literally, "with" everyone in the world. "You are cleared" is related to the verb "to argue." You will have proofs by which you can argue and demonstrate your innocence. The root of this word is used throughout the Bible with regard to proof (and reproof) and proving things, that is, clarification of any situation. Onkelos, however, translates it quite differently, taking *et* not as

KIMHI **16 Your brother.** As we have been calling him up to now. **Vindication.** Rather, "a covering of colors." Remember that "eyes" (OJPS) is a Hebrew idiom for colors: "in *color* it was like bdellium" (Num. 11:7). See also the Hebrew of "they gleamed like beryl" (Ezek. 1:16). The thousand pieces of silver was for Abraham to buy her and her servants brilliantly-colored clothing to cover them. **You are cleared before everyone.** Rather, after "all" that had happened (here and with Pharaoh), "Sarah was rebuked." She must never call him her brother again. The pointing of the verb shows that it is a participle

RASHBAM **16 And to Sarah he said.** Attempting both to appease her and to comfort her. **I herewith give your brother a thousand pieces of silver.** Rather, "I *gave* your brother a thousand pieces of silver"—as a bride-price. I did not seize you by force. After all, I thought he really was your brother, as you told me. — This is not the gift of v. 14; the thousand pieces of silver were given to Abraham before Abimelech "had Sarah brought to him" (v. 2). Even Pharaoh, who sinned far more grievously, treated Abraham well, giving him "sheep, oxen, asses, male and female slaves, she-asses, and camels" (12:16) before he married Sarah. Again, the custom was to offer presents of this kind *before* the wedding; see also 24:53 and 34:12. **This will serve you as vindication before all who are with you.** "This," the thousand pieces of silver that I gave as a bride-price, showed great respect for you. It will certainly vindicate you in the eyes of all your household and for that matter of the entire world. No one can look disdainfully at you and claim "Abimelech treated her as if she were a loose woman." For everyone knows that I tried my best to marry you honorably, but was forced to return you. — "Vindication" is literally "a covering of the eyes" (OJPS). The metaphor of the eyes being covered implies no one can see anything disgraceful, as when Moses tells Pharaoh that the locusts "shall cover the surface of the land, so that no one will be able to see the land" (Exod. 10:5). Looking "at" someone can be used in Biblical Hebrew for looking with scorn: "I have made you an object for kings *to stare at*" (Ezek. 28:17); "Let our eye obscenely *gaze on* Zion" (Mic. 4:11). **And you are**

IBN EZRA **16 This will serve you as vindication.** Some say this "covering of the eyes" (OJPS) is not "vindication" but "payback"—an allusion to her son Isaac's eyes growing "too dim to see" (27:1). But that is midrash. My opinion is that the phrase is intended to be read as if it were written twice: "for you a covering of the eyes, and a covering of the eyes to all that are with you" (compare OJPS for this more literal translation of the Hebrew). There are many cases in the Bible where a word is written once but must be understood a second time, e.g., "do not punish me in wrath; do [not] chastise me in fury" (Ps. 38:2). "Your husband Abraham is a covering of the eyes for you in the sense that no other man will lift his eyes toward you, and similarly for 'all who are with you,' the maidservants who are married to Abraham's servants." **And you are cleared before everyone.** The conjunction *ve-* here has the meaning of Arabic *fa*, an emphatic particle, as it does thousands of times in the Bible (e.g., 22:4, "On the third day *va-* Abraham looked up"). But this phrase is not part of what Abimelech says; it was written by Moses: "She was [emphatically] *rebuked*" and never again said that Abraham was her brother. And *ve-et kol* (which precedes this phrase; see OJPS) does not mean "before everyone," but "with all." With all this, Sarah was rebuked. Another perfectly good reading that has been suggested for the verse is: I am giving a thousand pieces of silver that will serve for your husband to buy you a covering "of the eyes" and some fancy-looking clothing; and I am also giving gifts to "all who are with you." And along "with all" I have given Abraham I am also giving him sheep and cattle and slaves.—But I prefer my own explanation, where what Abimelech gives is a "covering of the eyes" for her and the slaves she already had as well as the ones he is giving now. But *et kol* could possibly mean "before everyone" even if "Sarah was rebuked" is part of the narration. (In this case the *vav* is not

NAHMANIDES **16 I herewith give your brother a thousand pieces of silver.** Rather, "I have given" them (see OJPS). The "sheep and oxen, and male and female slaves" (v. 14) were worth a thousand pieces of silver. But "a thousand" may simply be a way of describing a huge amount, "as befits a king" (Esther 1:7, 2:18). For "thousand" used in this hyperbolic way, compare "The smallest shall become a thousand" (Isa. 60:22). **This will serve you as vindication.** Rather, as "a covering of the eyes" (OJPS). They will cover their eyes and their heads rather than look at you or **all who are with you,** even at your servant girls. So it was lucky for you that you were taken into my palace. Everyone will make sure not to look at you, thinking, "The king had to redeem his life for daring to take the prophet's wife." — The text, therefore, is explaining that Abimelech pacified Abraham with wealth and Sarah with words so he would not be punished on account of either of them. **And you are cleared before everyone.** Rather, "and despite all that, she continued to contend with him." Compare "the LORD has a case against His people, He *has a suit* against Israel" (Mic. 6:22); "I will *argue* my case before Him"

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **16 Vindication.** Literally, "a covering of the eyes," as in Prov. 12:16, "a clever man covers his humiliation" (Gersonides). **You are cleared before everyone.** Rather, "it is proved by all this." It is evident to all that Abraham knows I did not touch you. Had I done so, he would not have taken you back for all the money in the world. — As Prov. 6:34 and 31 tell us, "The fury of the husband will be passionate; he will show no pity on his day of vengeance," even if the other man were to "give up all he owns" (Bekhor Shor). Grammatically, Abimelech cannot be saying this to Sarah; nor can it mean that "Sarah was reproved" (for calling Abraham

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NJPS are cleared before everyone." 17Abraham then prayed to God, and God healed Abimelech and his wife and his slave girls, so that they bore children; 18for the LORD had closed fast every womb of the household of Abimelech because of Sarah, the wife of Abraham.

21 The LORD took note of Sarah as He had promised, and the LORD did for

OJPS men thou art righted." 17And Abraham prayed unto God; and God healed Abimelech, and his wife, and his maidservants; and they bore children. 18For the LORD had fast closed up all the wombs of the house of Abimelech, because of Sarah Abraham's wife.

21 And the LORD remembered Sarah as He had said, and the LORD did unto

וְנֹכֵחַת׃ 17 וַיִּתְפַּלֵּל אַבְרָהָם אֶל־הָאֱלֹהִים וַיִּרְפָּא אֱלֹהִים אֶת־אֲבִימֶלֶךְ וְאֶת־אִשְׁתּוֹ וְאַמְהֹתָיו וַיֵּלֵדוּ׃ 18 כִּי־עָצֹר עָצַר יְהוָה בְּעַד כָּל־רֶחֶם לְבֵית אֲבִימֶלֶךְ עַל־דְּבַר שָׂרָה אֵשֶׁת אַבְרָהָם׃ ס

א 21 וַיהוָה פָּקַד אֶת־שָׂרָה כַּאֲשֶׁר אָמָר וַיַּעַשׂ יְהוָה לְשָׂרָה כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֵּר׃

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ How could they possibly know in the space of one night and the next morning that "the LORD had closed fast every womb of the household of Abimelech because of Sarah" (v. 18)?

✦ What does it mean that "the LORD took note of Sarah as He had promised," and how is that different from "the LORD did for Sarah as He had spoken" (both in v. 1)?

RASHI "with" but as the marker of the direct object: "This will serve as a vindication of your honor, a covering against my eyes, which gazed at you and at all that you had." There are midrashim based on this verse as well, but my explanation resolves the difficulty.

17 So that they bore children. That is, as Onkelos translates, the blockages (see v. 9) were removed, and the various orifices "gave birth" to what had been ready to come forth from them.

18 For the LORD had closed fast every womb. Every orifice. **Because of Sarah.** Literally, "at Sarah's word," at her request.

21:1 The LORD took note of Sarah as He had promised. This story follows the

RASHBAM cleared. More precisely, "you are proved" by public demonstration to have been treated by me with the greatest of respect. Do not imagine anything to the contrary. — That is the straightforward sense of the expression. Abimelech said all this out of respect for Sarah, not to reproach or reprove her, as some think the Hebrew verb here means.

IBN EZRA emphatic, but a conjunction, as usual.) Saadia says those words do not mean "Sarah was rebuked" but "Sarah stood up to them," but this interpretation does not stand up.

17 They bore children. The wife and the slave girls did, not Abimelech. Compare "Give me my wives (and my children), for whom I have served you" (30:26); "Moses and Aaron among His priests, (Samuel, among those who call on His name)… He spoke to them in a pillar of cloud" (Ps. 99:6–7).

18 The LORD had closed fast every womb of the household of Abimelech. This explains clearly what is going on in v. 17. Notice that it discusses "the household of Abimelech" and not Abimelech himself. I have gone on at length about this because there are some commentators who claim that the Lord had stopped up Abimelech so that nothing could come out. It does, after all, say that He closed every *womb*. The fact that "they bore" of v. 17 is a masculine plural verb is meaningless; so is the verb in "the flocks *conceived*" (30:39).

KIMHI (compare "Tyre *shall remain forgotten*" of Isa. 23:15 for the form), not a second-person perfect. So these words were not spoken by Abimelech.

17 So that they bore children. It is well known that there are medical treatments for women who are unable to deliver, and a royal palace has no lack of expert physicians. They in fact tried various medical treatments, but nothing worked. So they knew that it was the finger of God. The verb is masculine because the referent of "they" is the compound object of the previous verb, which includes Abimelech. In his case the verb would mean that he once again became potent.

18 The LORD had closed fast every womb of the household of Abimelech. Perhaps even of the animals. As we read on B. BK 92a, "not even a hen laid an egg."

21:1 The LORD took note of Sarah as He had promised, and the LORD did for

NAHMANIDES (Job 13:15). The text is praising Sarah for not forgiving him, though Abraham was reconciled with Abimelech and even prayed for him.

17 They bore children. If this is to be taken literally, it must refer to his wife and his slave girls, not to Abimelech himself. But that is questionable. This would appear to have taken place early on the very next morning after Sarah was taken to the palace. There was simply no time for anyone's womb to have been "closed fast" (v. 18). Either they all were coincidentally on the point of giving birth that night, or Abraham's prayer in our verse lasted for many days. This would still leave no explanation for how, and from what, Abimelech himself was healed. Rashi's explanation cannot be correct. Even if we admit that "to give birth" can be metaphorical for "to bring forth," which we do indeed find (e.g., Zeph. 2:2, Ps. 7:15, Prov. 27:1), "womb" (v. 18) is never used for other "orifices." (It can be used metaphorically, as in Job 38:8, but that is not relevant to our case.) The translation of Onkelos does not support Rashi; Onkelos wanted to make sure the verb included Abimelech, but left "womb" as it is. Rashi's source in Genesis Rabbah is simply playing with the double Hebrew verb translated in v. 18 as "closed fast," not claiming that "womb" means "orifice." In my view, though, Abimelech was indeed struck with the inability to answer the call of nature. That is how the Holy One prevented him from touching her. For "touching" (v. 6) and "approaching" (v. 4) are euphemisms for sexual intercourse (see Exod. 19:15 and Isa. 8:3). But his wife, and those of his slave girls who were pregnant, were indeed prevented from delivering. Note that "closing" the womb means preventing the woman from conceiving, as in 1 Sam. 1:5, while closing "up" the womb (as here; see OJPS to v. 18) means preventing her from giving birth, as the expression is used (metaphorically) in Lam. 3:7. Sarah must have spent some time in the palace before Abimelech changed his mind. For he did not understand what was happening until God came to him in a dream and explained it to him. It was more polite and respectful to Sarah for the text not to discuss Abimelech's illness openly. But once Abraham prayed for them, "God healed Abimelech and his wife and his slave girls, so that [the females] bore children."

21:1 The LORD took note of Sarah. See Rashi's comment. But saying that He "took note" is simply another way of saying that He

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS her brother). Among other reasons, that does not fit with what Abimelech is saying. And it would sound as if following Abraham's request to call him her brother was reprehensible. Note, however, that Sarah was appeased by what Abimelech said; she did not reply to him. They parted on good terms (Gersonides).

21:1 The LORD took note of Sarah as He had promised. Rather, He "sat in judgment" on her. For "if the woman has not defiled

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NJPS Sarah as He had spoken. [2]Sarah conceived and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken. [3]Abraham gave his newborn son, whom Sarah had borne him, the name of Isaac. [4]And when his son Isaac was eight days old, Abraham circumcised him, as God had commanded him. [5]Now Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. [6]Sarah said, "God has brought me laughter; everyone who hears will laugh with me." [7]And she added,

[2] וַתַּהַר֙ וַתֵּ֣לֶד שָׂרָ֔ה לְאַבְרָהָ֖ם בֵּ֣ן לִזְקֻנָ֑יו
לַמּוֹעֵ֕ד אֲשֶׁר־דִּבֶּ֥ר אֹת֖וֹ אֱלֹהִֽים׃ [3] וַיִּקְרָ֣א
אַבְרָהָ֗ם אֶת־שֵׁם־בְּנ֤וֹ הַנּוֹלַד־לוֹ֙ אֲשֶׁר־
יָלְדָ֣ה ל֔וֹ שָׂרָ֖ה יִצְחָֽק׃ [4] וַיָּ֥מָל אַבְרָהָ֖ם
אֶת־יִצְחָ֥ק בְּנ֛וֹ בֶּן־שְׁמֹנַ֥ת יָמִ֖ים כַּאֲשֶׁ֣ר
צִוָּ֑ה אֹת֖וֹ אֱלֹהִֽים׃ [5] וְאַבְרָהָ֕ם בֶּן־מְאַ֥ת
שָׁנָ֖ה בְּהִוָּלֶ֥ד ל֛וֹ אֶת יִצְחָ֥ק בְּנֽוֹ׃ [6] וַתֹּ֣אמֶר
שָׂרָ֗ה צְחֹ֤ק עָשָׂה֙ לִ֣י אֱלֹהִ֔ים כָּל־הַשֹּׁמֵ֖עַ
יִצְחַק־לִֽי׃ [7] וַתֹּ֕אמֶר

OJPS Sarah as He had spoken. [2]And Sarah conceived, and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him. [3]And Abraham called the name of his son that was born unto him, whom Sarah bore to him, Isaac. [4]And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him. [5]And Abraham was a hundred years old, when his son Isaac was born unto him. [6]And Sarah said: "God hath made laughter for me; every one that heareth will laugh on account of me." [7]And she said:

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Don't we already know by now that this son is being born to Abraham "in his old age" (v. 2)? ✦ Why did Abraham name his son (v. 3) on the day he was born and not, in accordance with Jewish custom, on the day he was circumcised? ✦ Why tell us that "Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him" (v. 5)? Leaving aside the fact that we already know Abraham was 99 years old a year ago, why is this not stated at the time of the birth, but only after the circumcision? ✦ Why is it Sarah who says, "God has brought me laughter; everyone who hears will laugh with me" (v. 6), when, as 17:17 makes clear, the same applies to Abraham as well?

RASHI Abimelech episode to teach you that when one asks for mercy for someone else, if he needs the same thing his own need is granted first: "Abraham . . . prayed to God, and God healed Abimelech" (20:17), but (as our phrase should really be translated) "the Lord had [already] taken note of Sarah," even before healing Abimelech. **The LORD did for Sarah as He had spoken.** He had "taken note" of her with regard to conception, and He "did" for her with regard to giving birth. Note that "promised" of NJPS is literally "said" (OJPS). And we find both verbs used with regard to this verse. God *said*, "Nevertheless, Sarah your wife shall bear you a son" (17:19), and "the word of the LORD [as the Hebrew implies, the *spoken* word] came to Abram" (15:1) as follows: "Your very own issue shall be your heir" (15:4). But He carried out this latter promise "for Sarah" as well: "the LORD did for Sarah as He had spoken" to Abraham, bringing the heir through her.

2 At the set time of which God had spoken. Literally, "the time that God had spoken it" (see Onkelos)—not spoken "to him" as OJPS translates. When God said, "I will return to you at the time next year" (18:14), He scratched a line on the wall and said, "When the sun gets back to this line next year, she will give birth."

6 Everyone who hears will laugh with me. That is, "will rejoice for me." A midrash interprets this to say that many other barren women were "remembered" at the same time as Sarah, many sick people were healed on that day, many other prayers were answered along with hers, and the world was filled with joyous laughter.

RASHBAM 21:6 Laughter. Joyful wonder.

IBN EZRA 21:2 At the set time of which God had spoken. That is, of which the angel had spoken, the one who asked, "Where is your wife Sarah?" (18:9). So he did return, as he had promised in 18:10.

3 Abraham gave his newborn son, whom Sarah had borne him, the name of Isaac. As he had been commanded in 17:19. Note that (unlike Abraham) Isaac never had anything added to his name, and (unlike Jacob) his name was never changed.

KIMHI Sarah as He had spoken. This is repeated and re-emphasized over and over again due to the miraculous nature of the event.

2 Sarah conceived and bore a son to Abraham. "To" Abraham because a woman is like the soil which brings forth fruit after a man plants a seed. This is why the child is named after the father. **In his old age.** Remember that Sarah had been restored to her youthful self; Abraham had not. The Hebrew word for "old age" is always found in the plural and never occurs in the singular. The same is true of the words for "youth" and "virginity."

4 As God had commanded him. See 17:12.

5 Now Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. The particle *et*, which ordinarily marks the definite direct object of a verb, is sometimes used (as here) with the passive to focus attention on the *subject* of the verb.

NAHMANIDES "remembered" (OJPS), that He exercised providential care over the person of whom note was taken: "When God has *taken notice* of you, you shall carry up my bones from here" (50:25); "I have *taken note* of you and of what is being done to you in Egypt" (Exod. 3:16). Even Samson, who "visits" his wife in Judg. 15:1 (using this verb), is not just stopping by but bringing a gift. Here the verse goes on to explain what "taking note" of her means: **the LORD did for Sarah as He had spoken.** In other cases where a previously barren woman gives birth, the text literally uses the verb *remember*: "God remembered Rachel" (30:22); "Elkanah knew his wife Hannah and the LORD remembered her" (1 Sam. 1:19). B. RH 32b points out that verses with our "taking note" verb fit perfectly well into the *zikhronot*, the "remembrance" verses recited on Rosh Hashanah.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS herself and is pure, she shall be unharmed and able to retain seed" (Num. 5:28), and Sarah had been alone with Abimelech and not defiled herself (Hizkuni). "Taking note" can be positive or negative, as it is in the "accounting" of Exod. 32:34. So the text clarifies that taking note of Sarah was positive: **The LORD did for Sarah as He had spoken** (Abarbanel). Giving her a son, though older women generally bear daughters (Sforno).

2 At the set time of which God had spoken. Do not think the sun returning to the same line, as Rashi describes, means that 18:14 could not have occurred in Tishrei (since this was now Passover, in Nisan). Remember that those are the two times of year when the days and nights are of equal length (Hizkuni).

6 God has brought me laughter; everyone who hears will laugh with me. They will not worry about the pain of circumcision that Isaac is suffering (Sforno).

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NJPS "Who would have said to Abraham
That Sarah would suckle children!
Yet I have borne a son in his old age."
[8]The child grew up and was weaned, and Abraham held a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned.
[9]Sarah saw the son whom Hagar the Egyptian had borne to Abraham playing.

OJPS "Who would have said unto Abraham,
that Sarah should give children suck?
for I have borne him a son in his old age."
[8]And the child grew, and was weaned. And Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned.
[9]And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne unto

מִי מִלֵּל֙ לְאַבְרָהָ֔ם
הֵינִ֖יקָה בָּנִ֑ים שָׂרָ֔ה
כִּֽי־יָלַ֥דְתִּי בֵ֖ן לִזְקֻנָֽיו׃
8 וַיִּגְדַּ֥ל הַיֶּ֖לֶד וַיִּגָּמַ֑ל וַיַּ֤עַשׂ אַבְרָהָם֙
מִשְׁתֶּ֣ה גָד֔וֹל בְּי֖וֹם הִגָּמֵ֥ל אֶת־יִצְחָֽק׃
9 וַתֵּ֙רֶא שָׂרָ֔ה אֶת־בֶּן־הָגָ֥ר הַמִּצְרִ֖ית אֲשֶׁר־

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ With regard to "Who said to Abraham that Sarah would suckle children?" (as v. 7 literally says)—what is the puzzle? Both the Holy One and the angel said this. And what makes this the right place for this question? ✦ Why did Abraham hold a great feast "on the day that Isaac was weaned" (v. 8), rather than on the day when he was born or (as our custom is now) the day when he was circumcised?

RASHI **7 Who would have said to Abraham.** More precisely, "Who uttered this to Abraham?" She spoke in praise and high honor. "Look who He is and how He keeps His promises. The Holy One promises and performs." Besides the greater magnificence of the verb "utter," its numerical value is 100! "Who would have said this would happen when Abraham was 100 years old?" **That Sarah would suckle children!** What is meant by suckling "children," in the plural? On the day of the "great feast" (v. 8), the princesses brought along their own children and Sarah suckled them, so that they could not say, "Sarah did not give birth! She fetched a foundling from the street."

8 A great feast. A feast at which the greatest of that generation, Shem, Eber, and Abimelech, were in attendance. **On the day that Isaac was weaned.** At the age of 24 months.

9 Sarah saw the son whom Hagar the Egyptian had borne to Abraham playing. She saw him worshiping idols. The same verb is used when the people "rose up to *play*" (Exod. 32:6) before the Golden Calf. It can also refer to sexual play, as in "the Hebrew slave whom you brought into our house came to me to *dally* with me" (39:17). Another reading: It can refer to murder, as in "Let the young men come forward and *sport* before us" (2 Sam. 2:14). As you see from what Sarah says in v. 10, Ishmael was quarreling with Isaac about the inheritance: "I am the eldest, and so I get two shares!" They went outdoors and Ishmael seized his bow and shot arrows at him, "Like a madman scattering deadly firebrands, arrows, who . . . says, 'I was only *joking*'" (Prov. 26:18–19).

RASHBAM **7 Who would have said to Abraham?** Rather, "Who said to Abraham?" She is reminding all who hear her that they know perfectly well who promised Abraham that he would have a son by Sarah. **That Sarah would suckle children!** When they both were so old. The questions, of course, are rhetorical: "O God, Your ways are holiness; what god is as great as God?" (Ps. 77:14).

8 Weaned. That is, removed from the breast, as in "Stay home until you have weaned him" (1 Sam. 1:23). **Abraham held a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned.** Again, we find the same with Samuel: "When she had weaned him, she took him up with her [to Shiloh], along with three bulls, one ephah of flour, and a jar of wine" (1 Sam. 1:24).

9 Playing. But he was quite grown up. Sarah did not want to let him stay there any more lest he try to lay hands on his father's inheritance along with Isaac.

IBN EZRA **9 Playing.** As boys do. Sarah was jealous of him because he was older than her own son.

KIMHI **7 Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would suckle children!** The translations are correct. As for the plural "children," a woman who is suckling one baby can suckle others if she wants to.

8 The child grew up and was weaned. According to our Sages, the standard age for weaning children is 24 months. **Abraham held a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned.** This may have been the custom, or Abraham may have wanted a special celebration. Once a child is weaned, it is time to begin teaching him his letters (though the Sages say this is to begin at age three).

9 Playing. Rather, "making sport" (OJPS). He was making fun of Isaac for having been born of such elderly parents.

NAHMANIDES **7 Who would have said to Abraham.** We do not find "who" used as a rhetorical question (the way Rashi understands it here), to express praise and honor. It is the opposite, an expression of contempt: "Who is Abimelech and who are [we] Shechemites, that we should serve him?" (Judg. 9:28); "Who is David? Who is the son of Jesse? There are many slaves nowadays who run away from their masters" (1 Sam. 25:10). In my view, the English translations understand the sense correctly. "No one on earth would have said this to Abraham, even to make him feel better. It would never even have occurred to anyone." Onkelos says more or less the same thing.

9 Sarah saw the son whom Hagar the Egyptian had borne to Abraham playing. Here too Rashi is incorporating all sides of a dispute. **[M]** Said R. Simeon: God forbid that any of this should be found in a righteous man's home. How could it be possible that the man of whom it was said, "I have singled him out, that he may instruct his children and his posterity to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is just and right" (18:19), could have idolatry, sexual immorality, or bloodshed anywhere in his household? Rather, Ishmael was "teasing" Isaac about the inheritance. Everyone was glad when Isaac was born; but Ishmael said to them, "You fools! I am the first-born, and I get a double portion of the inheritance." From what Sarah says next [said R. Simeon], it is obvious that my explanation makes more sense than his. (Thus far the Tosefta.) Even Rashi's claim that Ishmael was quarreling with Isaac about the inheritance does not seem correct to me. That could not have happened until long after Isaac was weaned. But by then Ishmael would have been way too big for his mother to carry him "over her shoulder" (v. 14). (The Sages say he was 17; but that would still have to have been in the year Isaac was weaned.) Ibn Ezra says it really does just mean that Ishmael was "playing." I think the correct way to understand this story is that it tookplace on the very day Isaac was weaned. Sarah saw Ishmael making fun of him or of the "great feast" (v. 8). That is why the text does

[M] See Nahmanides' comment to 19:24.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **8 A great feast.** The phrase also occurs only in Esther 2:18 (Masorah).

9 Sarah saw the son whom Hagar the Egyptian had borne to Abraham playing. As boys do; but Isaac was too young to play, and Sarah was jealous of Ishmael on Isaac's behalf (Hizkuni). Ishmael was making fun of Isaac. He saw no reason to think Isaac was better than him—yet Abraham had made a great feast when he was weaned, which he did not do for Ishmael (Gersonides). Until Isaac

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NJPS [10]She said to Abraham, "Cast out that slave-woman and her son, for the son of that slave shall not share in the inheritance with my son Isaac." [11]The matter distressed Abraham greatly, for it concerned a son of his. [12]But God said to Abraham, "Do not be distressed over the boy or your slave; whatever Sarah tells you, do as she says, for it is through Isaac that offspring shall be continued for you. [13]As for the son of the slave-woman, I will make a nation of him, too, for he is your seed."

יָלְדָה לְאַבְרָהָם מְצַחֵק׃ 10 וַתֹּאמֶר לְאַבְרָהָם גָּרֵשׁ הָאָמָה הַזֹּאת וְאֶת־בְּנָהּ כִּי לֹא יִירַשׁ בֶּן־הָאָמָה הַזֹּאת עִם־בְּנִי עִם־יִצְחָק׃ 11 וַיֵּרַע הַדָּבָר מְאֹד בְּעֵינֵי אַבְרָהָם עַל אוֹדֹת בְּנוֹ׃ 12 וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים אֶל־אַבְרָהָם אַל־יֵרַע בְּעֵינֶיךָ עַל־הַנַּעַר וְעַל־אֲמָתֶךָ כֹּל אֲשֶׁר תֹּאמַר אֵלֶיךָ שָׂרָה שְׁמַע בְּקֹלָהּ כִּי בְיִצְחָק יִקָּרֵא לְךָ זָרַע׃ 13 וְגַם אֶת־בֶּן־הָאָמָה לְגוֹי אֲשִׂימֶנּוּ כִּי זַרְעֲךָ הוּא׃

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why did Sarah insist on expelling Hagar? What did Hagar have to do with Ishmael's "sharing in the inheritance with my son Isaac" (v. 10)? ✦ Why did Sarah insist on expelling Ishmael when she knew that "the matter distressed Abraham greatly" (v. 11)? ✦ How could the Holy One tell Abraham, "Whatever Sarah tells you, do as she says" (v. 12), if what Sarah is demanding is so illogical?

RASHI **10 With my son Isaac.** Literally, "with my son, with Isaac" (compare OJPS). "Just because he is my son, even if he were not as worthy as Isaac; or even if he were not my son, but were as worthy as Isaac is, Ishmael would not share in the inheritance with him. How much the more so given that he is both my son and as worthy as Isaac is."

11 The matter distressed Abraham greatly, for it concerned a son of his. The "thing" (see OJPS) that concerned Abraham about his son Ishmael was that he had heard that he was starting to act like a degenerate. But the straightforward sense is that he was upset that Sarah had told him to get rid of Ishmael.

12 Do as she says. We learn that Abraham was a lesser prophet than Sarah.

OJPS Abraham, making sport. [10]Wherefore she said unto Abraham: "Cast out this bondwoman and her son; for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac." [11]And the thing was very grievous in Abraham's sight on account of his son. [12]And God said unto Abraham: "Let it not be grievous in thy sight because of the lad, and because of thy bondwoman; in all that Sarah saith unto thee, hearken unto her voice; for in Isaac shall seed be called to thee. [13]And also of the son of the bondwoman will I make a nation, because he is thy seed."

RASHBAM **12 That offspring shall be continued for you.** My covenant, which I established with your offspring to give them the land of Canaan: "Know well that your offspring shall be strangers in a land not theirs . . . And they shall return here in the fourth generation" (15:13,16). It was with regard to Isaac that I gave you this promise.

IBN EZRA **11 It concerned.** It was about, it had to do with.

KIMHI **10 Cast out that slave-woman and her son.** It would not be possible to cast out the son alone; she would not remain without him. **My son Isaac.** Adding Isaac's name was to remind him of what the Holy One had said: "But My covenant I will maintain with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you" (17:21).

11 The matter distressed Abraham greatly. After all, Ishmael was his first-born son, and he had compassion for him "as a father has compassion for his children" (Ps. 103:13). He was on the right path, having grown up with Abraham, who taught him the way of the Lord. After all, Abraham guided strangers on the right path; he most certainly did so with his son.

12 Do not be distressed over the boy or your slave. Abraham was distressed about Hagar as well; she had served him for many years and even given him a son. Though v. 11 mentions only "his son," God knew what was in his heart. **Whatever Sarah tells you.** In this matter. **Do as she says.** She is speaking the truth: He shall not share in the inheritance with Isaac.

NAHMANIDES not say that "Ishmael" was playing, but uses the more scornful phrase "the son whom Hagar the Egyptian had borne." Sarah too refers to them as "that slave-woman and her son" (v. 10). "A slave who makes fun of his master deserves to be killed, or at least to be whipped! But all I ask is that you cast him out of my sight and that he not inherit any of your property along with my son, the legitimate son." She told him to cast out his mother as well, since "the boy cannot leave his mother; if he were to leave him, he would die." **[N]**

11 For it concerned a son of his. See Rashi's comment. In my view, the verse is speaking in praise of Abraham. He was not upset because of his desire for his concubine; if Sarah had wanted him to get rid of her alone, he would have done as she asked. It was because it concerned his son that he was angry and did not want to obey her. So the Holy One told him not to worry about either the boy or his mother, and promised to "make a nation of him, too" (v. 13), since he too was in truth Abraham's seed.

[N] Nahmanides is paraphrasing 44:22, about Jacob and Benjamin.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS was weaned (v. 8), it was not certain that he would survive. But now it was time for Abraham to accept him as his heir—to get rid of the peel and take hold of the fruit (Abarbanel). Sarah thought he had been prompted by his mother to make fun of the feast. He might even have made fun when Isaac was born, but Sarah was preoccupied then (Sforno).

10 Cast out that slave-woman and her son. Nahmanides, in his comment to v. 9, implies that Hagar was cast out as an afterthought. But that does not seem right. If Hagar was merely a concubine, she would not have been living in Abraham's house. That gave her the status of a full wife, whose son would be his heir just as much as Isaac. Sarah thought she herself would never give birth, so she had been perfectly happy for Ishmael to be raised in Abraham's house and inherit it. But now she did not want that to happen, as what follows makes clear. For Nahmanides to be right, the verse would have to say, "Cast out that son of a slave-woman and his mother" (Abarbanel). **The son of that slave shall not share in the inheritance with my son Isaac.** As it would be right for him to do. So I don't want him living here any more. After our deaths, he would say, "I too am a son of Abraham," and try to claim part of the inheritance (Bekhor Shor). We learn from Sarah's remarks that Ishmael was claiming the double share belonging to the first-born (Hizkuni).

12 Do not be distressed over the boy or your slave. Do not be distressed at sending them away with the symbols of slavery, bread and water (Sforno).

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NJPS [14]Early next morning Abraham took some bread and a skin of water, and gave them to Hagar. He placed them over her shoulder, together with the child, and sent her away. And she wandered about in the wilderness of Beer-sheba. [15]When the water was gone from the skin, she left the child under one of the bushes, [16]and went and sat down at a distance, a bowshot away;

OJPS [14]And Abraham arose up early in the morning, and took bread and a bottle of water, and gave it unto Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, and the child, and sent her away; and she departed, and strayed in the wilderness of Beer-sheba. [15]And the water in the bottle was spent, and she cast the child under one of the shrubs. [16]And she went, and sat her down over against him a good way off, as it were a bow-shot; for

14 וַיַּשְׁכֵּם אַבְרָהָם | בַּבֹּקֶר וַיִּקַּח־לֶחֶם
וְחֵמַת מַיִם וַיִּתֵּן אֶל־הָגָר שָׂם עַל־שִׁכְמָהּ
וְאֶת־הַיֶּלֶד וַיְשַׁלְּחֶהָ וַתֵּלֶךְ וַתֵּתַע בְּמִדְבַּר
בְּאֵר שָׁבַע׃ 15 וַיִּכְלוּ הַמַּיִם מִן־הַחֵמֶת
וַתַּשְׁלֵךְ אֶת־הַיֶּלֶד תַּחַת אַחַד הַשִּׂיחִם׃
16 וַתֵּלֶךְ וַתֵּשֶׁב לָהּ מִנֶּגֶד הַרְחֵק כִּמְטַחֲוִי

RASHI **14 Some bread and a skin of water.** But not gold and silver, because he abhorred his degenerate behavior. **He placed them over her shoulder, together with the child.** He placed the child over her shoulder as well, for Sarah had fixed the evil eye on him and he was so weak with fever that he could not walk on his own two feet. **And she wandered about.** Literally, she went and "strayed" (OJPS) by returning to the idol worship she had grown up with.

15 When the water was gone. For sick people drink a lot of water.

16 At a distance. "Over against him" (OJPS) also implies distance. **A bowshot away.** Rather, since the Hebrew word is plural, "two bowshots away." The meaning of the unusual Hebrew word is clarified by the usage of this root in Mishnaic Hebrew. The ו (which seems extraneous) is regularly found in nouns made from ל״ה roots; see (e.g.) Song 2:14 and Ps. 65:6. **And sitting thus afar.** "Afar" is the same Hebrew word that NJPS omitted at the beginning of the verse: "over against him" (OJPS). When he drew closer to death, she sat even further away.

KIMHI **14 Abraham took some bread and a skin of water, and gave them to Hagar.** He gave them enough food for a day or two—all she could carry. He gave her water as well, since she was on her way through the wilderness back to Egypt or the vicinity of it, to her family (remember that she was Egyptian). He certainly gave her silver and gold as well, though the text does not mention it. He would not have sent her and the boy off empty-handed. **He placed them over her shoulder.** The bread and water. **Together with the child.** To walk in front of her; he was 15 years old. But when he was tired she could carry him on her shoulder or in her arms. **And sent her away.** The verb does not make clear whether he "sent her away" from his house or "sent her off" by accompanying her until she had left the city. **And she wandered about in the wilderness of Beer-sheba.** Once she entered the wilderness, she lost her way.

15 The water was gone from the skin. Now her difficulties were doubled. All this is written to teach us that we should not panic when troubles come, but should trust that God will make things turn out all right. **She left the child under one of the bushes.** He was exhausted and she had been carrying him in her arms.

16 A bowshot away. She did not want him to be completely out of her sight.

NAHMANIDES **14 Together with the child, and sent her away.** That is, he gave her the bread and water and put them on her shoulder, and he gave her the child as well, so that wherever she would go, he would go.

15 She left the child under one of the bushes. He was overcome with thirst, and she indeed "left" him under one of the bushes, looking as if he had been "cast" there (as OJPS more literally translates) and abandoned. Or the verb may mean that she abandoned him: "The LORD uprooted them from their soil in anger, fury, and great wrath, and *cast* them into another land" (Deut. 29:27); "Do not *cast* me out of Your presence" (Ps. 51:13). Ibn Ezra takes it literally, which follows the rabbinic perspective that he was extremely ill at the time they were sent away. All this happened because Abraham was instructed to do whatever Sarah told him, and she ordered him to get rid of Ishmael immediately. It was her order, as well, that he not give them silver and gold, slaves, or camels to carry them.

RASHBAM **14 And she wandered about in the wilderness of Beer-sheba.** That is why "the water was gone from the skin" (v. 15). Had she gone straight to the inn, the water that Abraham had given her would have sufficed.

16 A bowshot. See Onkelos. **[E]**

[E] Since Onkelos uses the singular, Rashbam seems to be implicitly criticizing his grandfather's interpretation.

IBN EZRA **14 A skin of water.** The Hebrew word is less specific; it could be a skin, or it could a "bottle" (OJPS) or some other container made of wood. Many have wondered how Abraham could possibly have expelled his own son, especially sending him and his mother into the wilderness empty-handed. Where was his generosity? But the real wonder is about the people who ask this question. Abraham did exactly what the Holy One commanded him to do. If he had given Hagar money without Sarah's approval he would not have been following God's orders. Note that eventually, after Sarah's death, Abraham did give gifts to Ishmael's children. **[H] He placed them over her shoulder.** And he said to her, "Take your son with you," and he sent them off. But he may actually have given her silver and gold without the text telling us. **And she wandered about in the wilderness of Beer-sheba.** Abraham had certainly given her enough bread and water to last her until she got to Beer-sheba; remember that at this time he was in Gerar. But she did not know the way, and got lost.

15 She left the child under one of the bushes. Literally, she "cast" him. Her son was ill from lack of water, so she picked him up. But seeing that his soul was about to depart, she left him under the shade of a tree.

16 A bowshot away. This word "bowshot" is as alone as the boy was, a hapax legomenon. Still, its meaning is obvious.

[H] See 25:6 and Ibn Ezra's comment to 25:1.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **13 I will make a nation of him,** too—though he is unworthy of it—**for he is your seed** (Sforno).

14 Abraham . . . sent her away. Since he and Ishmael were both converts, their previous relationship had no standing in Jewish law, and Abraham was not obligated to leave him an inheritance. But he certainly intended to give him gifts after Sarah's death, as he later would in 25:6 to Keturah's sons. Note that Abraham had to send Hagar away; he could not sell her. See Deut. 21:14, "since you had your will of her, you must not enslave her" (Hizkuni). He undoubtedly gave her enough silver and gold to support her and her son after they got where they were going; it would be obnoxious to think Abraham would not do so (Gersonides). **Abraham took some bread and a skin of water, and gave them to Hagar. He placed them over her shoulder, together with the child.** The child was 16 or 17 at the time; they both carried bread and water on their shoulders. Abraham intended for them to go into the wilderness, which was Ishmael's natural element; otherwise, there would have been no need to give them water, which was to be found along the roads (Abarbanel). He put them on her shoulder to demonstrate her servitude (Sforno). **And sent her away.** Rather, as in 18:16, "and saw her off" (Sforno).

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NJPS for she thought, "Let me not look on as the child dies." And sitting thus afar, she burst into tears.

17God heard the cry of the boy, and an angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, "What troubles you, Hagar? Fear not, for God has heeded the cry of the boy where he is. 18Come, lift up the boy and hold him by the hand, for I will make a great nation of him." 19Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water. She went and filled the skin with water, and let the boy drink. 20God was with the boy and he grew up; he dwelt in

OJPS she said: "Let me not look upon the death of the child." And she sat over against him, and lifted up her voice, and wept.

17And God heard the voice of the lad; and the angel of God called to Hagar out of heaven, and said unto her: "What aileth thee, Hagar? fear not; for God hath heard the voice of the lad where he is. 18Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him fast by thy hand; for I will make him a great nation." 19And God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water; and she went, and filled the bottle with water, and gave the lad drink. 20And God was with the lad, and he grew; and he

קָשֶׁת כִּי אָמְרָה אַל־אֶרְאֶה בְּמוֹת הַיָּלֶד
וַתֵּשֶׁב מִנֶּגֶד וַתִּשָּׂא אֶת־קֹלָהּ וַתֵּבְךְּ׃
17 וַיִּשְׁמַע אֱלֹהִים אֶת־קוֹל הַנַּעַר וַיִּקְרָא
מַלְאַךְ אֱלֹהִים ׀ אֶל־הָגָר מִן־הַשָּׁמַיִם
וַיֹּאמֶר לָהּ מַה־לָּךְ הָגָר אַל־תִּירְאִי כִּי־
שָׁמַע אֱלֹהִים אֶל־קוֹל הַנַּעַר בַּאֲשֶׁר הוּא־
שָׁם׃ 18 קוּמִי שְׂאִי אֶת־הַנַּעַר וְהַחֲזִיקִי
אֶת־יָדֵךְ בּוֹ כִּי־לְגוֹי גָּדוֹל אֲשִׂימֶנּוּ׃
19 וַיִּפְקַח אֱלֹהִים אֶת־עֵינֶיהָ וַתֵּרֶא בְּאֵר
מָיִם וַתֵּלֶךְ וַתְּמַלֵּא אֶת־הַחֵמֶת מַיִם
וַתַּשְׁקְ אֶת־הַנָּעַר׃ 20 וַיְהִי אֱלֹהִים אֶת־
הַנַּעַר וַיִּגְדָּל וַיֵּשֶׁב בַּמִּדְבָּר וַיְהִי רֹבֶה

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ How could "an angel of God call to Hagar from heaven" (v. 17)? She was hardly worthy of prophecy. (The prophecies to her in ch. 16 were for Abraham's sake.) ✦ If the prophecy was for the sake of Ishmael, who was after all Abraham's son, why did the angel not speak to him directly? He was already at least 17 years old.

RASHI **17 The cry of the boy.** From this we derive that a sick person's prayer for himself is more powerful than someone else's prayer for him and is answered first. **Where he is.** He will be judged on what he is doing now, not on what he might do in the future. — For the ministering angels were denouncing him: "Sovereign of the Universe! For the one who in the future will kill your sons by thirst you are producing a well?!" He replied, "What is he now, innocent or guilty?" They answered, "Innocent." He said, "I am judging him based on his current actions." This is the meaning of "where he is." And when did he kill Israelites by thirst? When Nebuchadnezzar exiled them, as we learn from Isaiah's "In the Steppe" Pronouncement: "Meet the thirsty with water, You who dwell in the land of Tema" (Isa. 21:14). When the Babylonians were leading the captive Israelites past the Arabs, they told their captors, "Please take us past the descendants of our Uncle Ishmael, so that they might take pity on us." (These are the "caravans of the Dedanites" in Isa. 21:13; note the likeness of "Dedanites" to Hebrew *dod*, "uncle.") What they actually brought them was meat and salt fish and inflated skins, which the Israelites thought were full of water. When they put them to their mouths to drink, the air rushed into their bodies and they died.

20 A bowman. Literally, "a shooter, a bow-er." That is, one who shoots arrows with a bow. The second of these words is a noun of

RASHBAM **17 Where he is.** She could not see the boy, since she had gone some distance away. So the angel had to tell her that he had given water to the boy where he was.

20 A bowman. Literally, "one who draws the bow." In 49:23, Ps. 48:13, and Job 16:13, the geminate root רבב is used with this meaning, but here the root is רבה.

IBN EZRA **17 An angel of God called to Hagar from heaven.** This was the same place where the angel had appeared to her in ch. 16. **[I]**

20 A bowman. For the meaning "shooter" for the first of the two Hebrew words that make up this expression, see

[I] These words appear at the end of Ibn Ezra's comment to v. 20, as if it were a comment on two Hebrew words from 16:13. This seems to be the logical place for them; if not, what Ibn Ezra intended is unclear.

KIMHI **17 God heard the cry of the boy.** For he too "burst into tears" (v. 16). **An angel of God called to Hagar from heaven.** She heard his voice "from heaven," but did not see him as she had at Beer-lahai-roi.

18 Hold him by the hand. Do not be "dishanded" (the Hebrew idiom for "disheartened"). Do not despair of him.

19 Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water. The well may have been hidden in the bushes, or it may have been far away; note that she "went" to fill the skin. But God made sure that she saw it. Or it may not have been there at all until God split open the earth so that water could come forth, as when "God split open the hollow which is at Lehi, and the water gushed out of it" (Judg. 15:19) for Samson.

20 God was with the boy and he grew up. God was "with" the boy in the sense of granting him success; and "he grew" (OJPS) in wealth and possessions. **And became a bowman.** Onkelos translates the two Hebrew words here as "bow-boy," which might mean

NAHMANIDES **17 Where he is.** Rashi's comment is derived from the words of our Sages. In my view, the straightforward sense is that it really means "in the place where he is." There would be no need to go elsewhere for water; his thirst would be quenched right on the spot, immediately. For "in which" (as our verse literally says) expressing "where," compare "Where he sank, there he lay" (Judg. 5:27); "Where the slain are, there is he" (Job 39:30).

18 Come, lift up the boy. After he has had something to drink.

20 A bowman. Some think *roveh*, the first of the two Hebrew words in this expression, means "an archer" (OJPS). But *roveh* simply means "a shooter," referring to anyone who shoots arrows, slings stones, and the like. Laban uses the synonym *yoreh* to describe the cairn

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **17 God heard the cry of the boy.** But not that of Hagar, who was Egyptian. The boy himself made no sound, but "God heard his cry" in the same sense as in 4:10, where "Your brother's blood cries out to Me from the ground!" (Abarbanel). **An angel of God called to Hagar from heaven.** On earth, angels appear as human beings, so people are not aware that they are angels. (It is not the way of the Holy One to reveal that.) But when one calls "from heaven," it is clear that he is an angel (Bekhor Shor). "From heaven" may simply mean that this particular prophet was instructed to take this message to her. Otherwise, we would have to imagine that Hagar was a prophet herself, which is unlikely (Gersonides). The Holy One did not want her to abandon Ishmael—Abraham could not have left his son abandoned in the wilderness—or to marry another man and send Ishmael back to Abraham (Abarbanel). **God has heeded the cry of the boy.** Since he did not say "I have heeded," it was clear he was an angel and not God Himself (Bekhor Shor). **Where he is.** But not to return him to his father's house (Abarbanel).

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NJPS the wilderness and became a bowman. 21He lived in the wilderness of Paran; and his mother got a wife for him from the land of Egypt.

22At that time Abimelech and Phicol, chief of his troops, said to Abraham, "God is with you in everything that you do. 23Therefore swear to me here by God that you will not deal falsely with me or with my kith and kin, but will deal with me and with the land in which you have sojourned as loyally as I have dealt with you." 24And Abraham said, "I swear it."

OJPS dwelt in the wilderness, and became an archer. 21And he dwelt in the wilderness of Paran; and his mother took him a wife out of the land of Egypt.

22And it came to pass at that time, that Abimelech and Phicol the captain of his host spoke unto Abraham, saying: "God is with thee in all that thou doest. 23Now therefore swear unto me here by God that thou wilt not deal falsely with me, nor with my son, nor with my son's son; but according to the kindness that I have done unto thee, thou shalt do unto me, and to the land wherein thou hast sojourned." 24And Abraham said: "I will swear."

קַשָּׁת׃ 21 וַיֵּשֶׁב בְּמִדְבַּר פָּארָן וַתִּקַּח־לוֹ
אִמּוֹ אִשָּׁה מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם׃ פ ששי
22 וַיְהִי בָּעֵת הַהִוא וַיֹּאמֶר אֲבִימֶלֶךְ וּפִיכֹל
שַׂר־צְבָאוֹ אֶל־אַבְרָהָם לֵאמֹר אֱלֹהִים
עִמְּךָ בְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר־אַתָּה עֹשֶׂה׃ 23 וְעַתָּה
הִשָּׁבְעָה לִּי בֵאלֹהִים הֻנָּה אִם־תִּשְׁקֹר לִי
וּלְנִינִי וּלְנֶכְדִּי כַּחֶסֶד אֲשֶׁר־עָשִׂיתִי עִמְּךָ
תַּעֲשֶׂה עִמָּדִי וְעִם־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר־גַּרְתָּה
בָּהּ׃ 24 וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָהָם אָנֹכִי אִשָּׁבֵעַ׃

RASHI the form that indicates one's profession: donkey driver, camel driver, hunter, and so forth. In this case, Ishmael "dwelt in the wilderness" and robbed travelers. As we were told earlier, "His hand against everyone, and everyone's hand against him" (16:12).

21 From the land of Egypt. Where she had grown up (see 16:1). As the saying goes, "Throw a branch in the air and it will fall root first."

22 God is with you. He had seen that Abraham escaped the vicinity of Sodom unharmed; that he had fought with the kings and defeated them; **[K]** and that his wife had been "remembered" in his old age.

23 Or with my kith and kin. Rather, "nor with my son, nor with my son's son" (OJPS). This is how far a father's love for his son extends. **As loyally as I have dealt with you.** When I said, "Here, my land is before you; settle wherever you please" (20:15).

[K] See ch. 14.

RASHBAM **21 In the wilderness of Paran.** We see that calling him "a wild ass [*pe're*] of a man" (16:12) was a play on words.

22 At that time. At the time when Isaac was born. Abimelech realized that the Holy One had performed miracles for Abraham, so they came to make a covenant with him. The phrase "at that time" always requires an explanation that matches what is happening in the story.

23 Kin. The Hebrew word literally means "grandson."

KIMHI either one who shoots with the bow—"an archer" (OJPS)—or one who makes bows. But they really mean "bow shooter": an archer. We see that the men of Kedar (Ishmael's descendants) learned this from him; Isaiah refers to "the remaining bows of Kedar's warriors" (Isa. 21:17). It is good for a man to learn his father's trade. As Joseph's brothers told Pharaoh, "We your servants are shepherds, as were also our fathers" (47:3).

21 His mother got a wife for him from the land of Egypt. From her own family; she saw that he was separated from his father's family.

22 At that time. When Isaac was born, or perhaps when he was weaned—when they were still in Philistia. **Abimelech and Phicol, chief of his troops.** It was Phicol who advised Abimelech to do this. **Said to Abraham.** In Gerar. They did not "go" and say, they merely "said." After the Sarah incident, Abimelech realized that it would be a good idea to be on friendly terms with Abraham.

23 Swear to me here by God that you will not deal falsely. The Hebrew idiom is "swear to me here *if* you *will* deal falsely," that is, "swear to me, for perhaps you will deal falsely." **With me and with the land in which you have sojourned.** That is, with its inhabitants, after I am gone. **As I have dealt with you.** When I said, "Here, my land is before you; settle wherever you please" (20:15).

24 I swear it. Rather, "I will swear" (OJPS)—and you swear too.

IBN EZRA "Summon *archers* against Babyon" (Jer. 50:29), though that is not from רבה but from the related רבב. There are other such pairs of roots. "Bowman" (the second Hebrew word) describes what kind of "shooter" he was.

23 That you will not deal falsely. The use of the Qal with this verb is unique; ordinarily it is a Piel.

NAHMANIDES of stones that he "threw" together to witness his agreement with Jacob (31:51). That is why the second word, "archer," was added: to clarify the meaning of the first word. Compare 1 Sam. 31:3, where "archers" is literally "shooters of the bow."

23 Swear to me here by God that you will not deal falsely with me. The word *im* does not mean "that"; it always means "if." Do not think of it in any other way. It is used frequently in oaths: "if you deal falsely with me . . . !" See similarly the Hebrew of 1 Sam. 3:14, Ps. 89:36 and 95:11, and Deut. 1:34–35. The implication is, "Thus and more may God do to you" *if* you deal falsely with me. Compare 26:28–29, where Abimelech and Phicol tell Isaac, "Let there be a sworn treaty between our two parties," and they continue (in the literal translation), "*if* you do us harm . . ." The implication of the idiom—even when spoken by the One on high—is, "*If* such-and-such happens, then my words are not true." But the consequences are left unexpressed. Similarly, Jabez invokes the God of Israel and says, "If you bless me . . . ," but does not say what he will do in that case—yet "God granted what he asked" (1 Chron. 4:10). See also Num. 14:21–23. As for "deal falsely," remember that Abimelech was the king and Abraham was a stranger in his land. But he may have meant it literally: "that you will not lie to me" about your alliance with me. And in fact Abimelech was a reliable ally of Abraham's. He treated him with respect and did as he wished. Abraham had no point of contention with Abimelech but for the well of v. 25 (which

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **22 Abimelech and Phicol, chief of his troops.** Abimelech was the king's title, not his name. "Pharaoh" too was a title for the king of Egypt, not his name. It is like calling someone "emperor." Compare 1 Sam. 21:13–16, where David feigns madness out of fear of "King Achish of Gath," with Ps. 34:1, where David "feigned madness in the presence of Abimelech." Phicol ("by my mouth, all") was no doubt also a title, for the commander of the army (Bekhor Shor).

23 Or with my kith and kin. Rather, "nor with my son, nor with my son's son" (OJPS). But the treaty in Isaac's time was only "between you and us" (26:28), since it could not outlast "the fourth generation" (15:16), when Abraham's descendants would return (Hizkuni).

24 I swear it. Rather, "I will swear" (OJPS). But I cannot make any commitment for my descendants (Abarbanel).

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NJPS [25]Then Abraham reproached Abimelech for the well of water which the servants of Abimelech had seized. [26]But Abimelech said, "I do not know who did this; you did not tell me, nor have I heard of it until today." [27]Abraham took sheep and oxen and gave them to Abimelech, and the two of them made a pact. [28]Abraham then set seven ewes of the flock by themselves, [29]and Abimelech said to Abraham, "What mean these seven ewes which you have set apart?" [30]He replied, "You are to accept these seven ewes from me as proof that I dug this well." [31]Hence that place was called Beer-sheba, for there the two of them swore an oath. [32]When they had concluded the pact at Beer-sheba, Abimelech and Phicol, chief of his troops, departed and returned to the land of the Philistines. [33][Abraham] planted a tamarisk

[25] וְהוֹכַ֣ח אַבְרָהָ֔ם אֶת־אֲבִימֶ֖לֶךְ עַל־
אֹד֣וֹת בְּאֵ֣ר הַמַּ֑יִם אֲשֶׁ֥ר גָּזְל֖וּ עַבְדֵ֥י
אֲבִימֶֽלֶךְ׃ [26] וַיֹּ֣אמֶר אֲבִימֶ֗לֶךְ לֹ֤א יָדַ֙עְתִּי֙
מִ֣י עָשָׂ֣ה אֶת־הַדָּבָ֣ר הַזֶּ֔ה וְגַם־אַתָּ֖ה לֹא־
הִגַּ֣דְתָּ לִּ֑י וְגַ֕ם אָנֹכִ֖י לֹ֣א שָׁמַ֔עְתִּי בִּלְתִּ֖י
הַיּֽוֹם׃ [27] וַיִּקַּ֣ח אַבְרָהָ֗ם צֹ֚אן וּבָקָ֔ר וַיִּתֵּ֖ן
לַאֲבִימֶ֑לֶךְ וַיִּכְרְת֥וּ שְׁנֵיהֶ֖ם בְּרִֽית׃ [28] וַיַּצֵּ֣ב
אַבְרָהָ֔ם אֶת־שֶׁ֥בַע כִּבְשֹׂ֖ת הַצֹּ֑אן לְבַדָּֽהֶן׃
[29] וַיֹּ֣אמֶר אֲבִימֶ֔לֶךְ אֶל־אַבְרָהָ֖ם מָ֣ה הֵ֔נָּה
שֶׁ֥בַע כְּבָשֹׂ֖ת הָאֵ֣לֶּה אֲשֶׁ֥ר הִצַּ֖בְתָּ לְבַדָּֽנָה׃
[30] וַיֹּ֕אמֶר כִּ֚י אֶת־שֶׁ֣בַע כְּבָשֹׂ֔ת תִּקַּ֖ח מִיָּדִ֑י
בַּעֲב֣וּר תִּֽהְיֶה־לִּ֗י לְעֵדָ֛ה כִּ֥י חָפַ֖רְתִּי אֶת־
הַבְּאֵ֥ר הַזֹּֽאת׃ [31] עַל־כֵּ֛ן קָרָ֥א לַמָּק֖וֹם
הַה֑וּא בְּאֵ֣ר שָׁבַ֔ע כִּֽי־שָׁ֥ם נִשְׁבְּע֖וּ שְׁנֵיהֶֽם׃
[32] וַיִּכְרְת֥וּ בְרִ֖ית בִּבְאֵ֣ר שָׁ֑בַע וַיָּ֣קָם
אֲבִימֶ֗לֶךְ וּפִיכֹל֙ שַׂר־צְבָא֔וֹ וַיָּשֻׁ֖בוּ אֶל־
אֶ֥רֶץ פְּלִשְׁתִּֽים׃ [33] וַיִּטַּ֥ע אֶ֖שֶׁל בִּבְאֵ֣ר

OJPS [25]And Abraham reproved Abimelech because of the well of water, which Abimelech's servants had violently taken away. [26]And Abimelech said: "I know not who hath done this thing; neither didst thou tell me, neither yet heard I of it, but to-day." [27]And Abraham took sheep and oxen, and gave them unto Abimelech; and they two made a covenant. [28]And Abraham set seven ewe-lambs of the flock by themselves. [29]And Abimelech said unto Abraham: "What mean these seven ewe-lambs which thou hast set by themselves?" [30]And he said: "Verily, these seven ewe-lambs shalt thou take of my hand, that it may be a witness unto me, that I have digged this well." [31]Wherefore that place was called Beer-sheba; because there they swore both of them. [32]So they made a covenant at Beer-sheba; and Abimelech rose up, and Phicol the captain of his host, and they returned into the land of the Philistines. [33]And Abraham planted a tamarisk-

RASHI **25 Abraham reproached Abimelech.** More precisely, he "argued" with him about it.

30 You are to accept these seven ewes from me as proof that I dug this well. Abimelech's shepherds had been arguing, "We dug it!" Abraham and Abimelech agreed on the "proof" they would accept: whoever appeared at the well and found that the water rose up to meet him, the well would be his. And the water rose to meet Abraham's seven ewes. The Hebrew word *edah* here ("proof") is a feminine form of the similar word *edut* ("witness"; see OJPS). Compare "this pillar shall be *witness*" (31:52).

33 [Abraham] planted a tamarisk. Rav and Samuel had a dispute about this, one arguing that he planted an orchard to have fruit to serve to guests and one that the Hebrew

RASHBAM **33 [Abraham] planted a tamarisk.** Rather, "a grove" of trees, where he could pray.

IBN EZRA **29 Apart.** The same word as "by themselves" (v. 28; see OJPS), but spelled here with final ה—and it is all by itself biblically in that respect.

31 Hence that place was called Beer-sheba, for there the two of them swore an oath. An "oath" (*shebuah*) comes from *sheba* ("seven"); see my comment to Num. 30:3. **[J]**

33 [Abraham] planted a tamarisk. This must indeed be a tree, since he "planted" it.

[J] In that comment Ibn Ezra discusses the verb "to swear" but not the connection with Beer-sheba.

KIMHI **25 Then.** Once the oaths had been sworn. **Abraham reproached Abimelech for the well of water which the servants of Abimelech had seized.** For Beer-sheba was near Philistia. Abraham and Abimelech went there to see whether the well Abraham had dug was in the territory of Beer-sheba or of Philistia. At least, this seems to have been what happened, though it is not written in the text.

26 You did not tell me, nor have I heard of it until today. So I am not responsible.

27 Abraham took sheep and oxen and gave them to Abimelech, and the two of them made a pact. This established the agreement of vv. 23–24.

28 Abraham then set seven ewes of the flock by themselves. Seven (*sheba*) would serve to remind future generations of the oath (*shebuah*), which is why the place was called Beer-sheba.

31 Hence that place was called Beer-sheba. Literally, "*he* called the place Beer-sheba." Naming a location is a great sign that you have taken possession of the place.

32 Abimelech and Phicol, chief of his troops, departed and returned to the land of the Philistines. But Abraham remained behind for a day or two before he also returned to his home in Gerar.

33 [Abraham] planted a tamarisk at Beer-sheba. Near the well, showing that it was indisputably in his possession. **And invoked**

NAHMANIDES Abimelech's servants had dug). In fact, Abimelech insists that Abraham deal with him **as loyally as I have dealt with you.**

32 Returned to the land of the Philistines. That is, to their own city, which was in the land of the Philistines, which is also where the whole incident took place. But they were living in Gerar, the royal capital, and he was living in Beer-sheba, which is also in the land of the Philistines, in "the wadi of Gerar" (26:17).

33 And invoked there the name of the LORD, the Everlasting God. More precisely, "the God of eternity," the One who controls

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **27 Abraham took sheep and oxen and gave them to Abimelech.** The "seven ewes" of the following verses, sealing the pact, would have seemed an embarrassingly small gift for a king (Abarbanel).

30 You are to accept these seven ewes from me as proof that I dug this well. As in Ruth 4:7, "Now this was formerly done in Israel in cases of redemption or exchange: to validate any transaction, one man would take off his sandal and hand it to the other. Such was the practice in Israel" (Sforno).

31 Hence that place was called Beer-sheba. The place, but not the city, which Isaac will name in 26:33 (Hizkuni).

33 [Abraham] planted a tamarisk. A large tree, commemorating the treaty (Bekhor Shor). To provide shade for the well (Gersonides). As we know from 18:8, he did the same at the terebinths of Mamre (Abarbanel).

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NJPS at Beer-sheba, and invoked there the name of the LORD, the Everlasting God. 34And Abraham resided in the land of the Philistines a long time.

OJPS tree in Beer-sheba, and called there on the name of the LORD, the Everlasting God. 34And Abraham sojourned in the land of the Philistines many days.

22 Some time afterward, God put

שֶׁבַע וַיִּקְרָא־שָׁם בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה אֵל עוֹלָם׃
34 וַיָּגָר אַבְרָהָם בְּאֶרֶץ פְּלִשְׁתִּים יָמִים
רַבִּים׃ פ

שביעי
כב וַיְהִי אַחַר הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה

22 And it came to pass after these

RASHI word really refers to an inn (which of course would have all kinds of fruit in it). One can "plant" a tent, of course (see Dan. 11:45). **And invoked there the name of the LORD, the Everlasting God**. By means of that "tamarisk" the name of the Holy One was invoked. After guests had eaten and drunk, Abraham would say to them, "Give thanks to the One from whose bounty you have eaten. You thought what you ate was mine, but it really came from the One who spoke and the world was created." **[L]**

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why is it necessary to tell us that this story occurred "afterward" (v. 1), or more precisely "after these things" (OJPS)?

RASHBAM 22:1 Some time afterward. The Hebrew expression does indeed mean "after what was described in the preceding chapter." Thus, in Genesis 14 Abraham killed the kings, and "some time later" the Holy One told him, "Fear not, Abram" (15:1). In our own chapter, "Abraham was

IBN EZRA 22:1 God put Abraham to the test. Some say that *nisa* here is the equivalent of its homonym, נשא instead of נסה: "God *uplifted* Abraham." But everything about the story refutes them. It means exactly what it says. Now, philosophers say

34 A long time. Longer than he lived at Hebron. He spent 25 years at Hebron and 26 here. He was 75 when he left Haran, the same year he "came to dwell at the terebinths of Mamre, which are in Hebron" (13:18). For we do not find him "dwelling" anywhere before he "dwelt" there. Everywhere else, he was a guest, camping for a while and then traveling on: "Abram *passed through* the land" (12:6), "*moved on* to the hill country" (12:8), and "went down to Egypt to *sojourn* there" (12:10). He spent just three months in Egypt before Pharaoh threw him out, at which point "he proceeded by stages" (13:3) until finally he "moved his tent, and came to dwell at the terebinths of Mamre, which are in Hebron" (13:18). He remained there until Sodom was annihilated, at which point he "journeyed from there" (20:1)—out of shame about Lot—and came to the land of the Philistines. He was 99 years old then, for the angels who came to him in ch. 18 came on the third day following his circumcision. So it was the 25th year since he had left Haran. The "long time" of our verse must imply a longer time than the previous one, for the text does not come to confuse us, but to enlighten us. If this stay had been two years or more longer, the text would have said so explicitly; it must therefore have been no more than one year longer, that is, 26 years. Immediately afterward, Abraham returned to Hebron. The binding of Isaac, related in the next chapter, took place 12 years later. All this is based on Seder Olam.

22:1 Some time afterward. Literally, "after these words." Some of the Sages say: After the words of Satan, who accused, "At all these feasts that Abraham has held, he has not offered a single bull or a single ram before You." The Holy One replied, "Would he have

[L] Rashi's comments are based on the rabbinic notion, which he cites in his Talmud commentary, that the Hebrew word *eshel* ("tamarisk") is really an acronym for *achilah, shetiyah, leviyah* ("eating, drinking, escorting on the way"). Some sources replace *leviyah* with *linah* ("spending the night") in this expression.

KIMHI there the name of the LORD, the Everlasting God. After all that had happened to him, he summoned his family and "called" (OJPS) on them to hold fast to belief in the Holy One and in none other.

34 And Abraham resided in the land of the Philistines a long time. He had a pact with Abimelech and was afraid of no one. In general, Philistia was a land of plenty, as we see from the story of the Shunammite woman, who lived there for seven years on account of a famine in Israel. **[J]**

22:1 Some time afterward. After he had "resided in the land of the Philistines a long time" (21:34) and then gone to Beer-sheba to live for a while. **God put Abraham to the test**. It is very hard to relate the idea of testing to God, who "probes the heart and searches the

[J] See 2 Kings 8.

NAHMANIDES time. Or the verse may be using *olam* the way it is used in rabbinic Hebrew: "God of *the world*." Abraham was "calling there" (see OJPS) to make known to all humanity the mystery of the Power that controls time and space as a whole, which is done through "the name of the LORD," the mighty One, who has divine power over them all. Maimonides says in the *Guide* that the expression "Everlasting God" alludes to God's having already existed since infinitely far back in the past. Abraham was announcing that He had preceded time. But Onkelos does understand Abraham to be merely "invoking" the name, that is, praying.

22:1 God put Abraham to the test. This business of testing, in my view, is based on the fact that human beings have absolute free will to do as they wish. When someone can do something if he wants to but does not have to if he does not want to, anything he is asked

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS 34 Abraham resided in the land of the Philistines a long time. Despite the fact that he did not want to settle down there, since it was not in Canaan. Eventually he found a good place, close to that land, in Canaan—at Beer-sheba, which was the best place for receiving the divine overflow (Gersonides).

Chapter 22

This incident is so central to the welfare of Israel that we recount it in our prayers every day. So it demands much deeper scrutiny than other stories. I have studied the other commentators, and (in the words of Ruth 2:2) "I will go to the fields and glean among the ears." But the basic purpose of this incident was to redeem us from the sin of Adam, the pursuit of lust and the other appetites. From this time forward, Isaac and his descendants would no longer be constrained by their physical desires, but would be ruled by the intellect alone. We were all part of this sacrifice. The Holy One wished to choose us to serve Him, but that could not happen until the poison that the serpent injected into Eve was removed from us. As R. Simeon b. Lakish says, Satan is the evil impulse and the evil impulse is the angel of death—and it is well known that Satan was the serpent involved in the sin of Adam (Abarbanel).

1 Some time afterward. After Abraham had become a great prince, with whom kings made treaties (Bekhor Shor). Just

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וְהָאֱלֹהִים נִסָּה אֶת־אַבְרָהָם וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו

NJPS Abraham to the test. He said to him, "Abraham," and he answered,

OJPS things, that God did prove Abraham, and said unto him: "Abraham"; and

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ What was the purpose of this incident? It was clearly not for the Holy One's sake, since He knows all hidden secrets; nor for Abraham's, since God's knowledge does not depend on external actions; nor for Isaac's, since due to the nature of those who engendered him he was already perfect and needed no improvement (and in any case it was Abraham whom God "tested"); nor for the rest of the world to know something, since it took place in such a secluded spot (and v. 12 says, "now *I* know"). So what can possibly have been the purpose of this strange incident? ✦ Why are we told that "God put Abraham to the test"? According to our tradition, God tested Abraham 10 times, but this statement is made nowhere else.

RASHI held any of these feasts but for his son? Yet if I were to tell him, 'Sacrifice your son before Me,' he would not resist." Others say: After the words of Ishmael, who was bragging to Isaac that he had been circumcised at age 13 without protest. Said Isaac, "You're trying to frighten me with cutting a single one of your organs? If the Holy One were to tell me, 'Sacrifice yourself

KIMHI mind" (Jer. 17:10) **[K]** and knew that Abraham would obey His command. It cannot have been intended to publicize Abraham's deed to the rest of the world, since no one was there but him and his son. (If he had told the story, would anyone have believed it?) The truth is that its purpose was to show Abraham's complete love to the future generations who would believe in the Torah written by our master Moses at God's dictation. They too would learn to love God with all their heart and with all their soul. Abraham loved Isaac more than his own life. For he was old, and if he were to die, it would be a natural death, at a ripe old age. But his son was still a boy, who did not yet have a wife and children of his own and had not yet had a chance to enjoy the world. But when God told him to offer Isaac up, all his love and affection was as nothing in his eyes. He did not question Him or challenge Him. In truth, the story was passed down in Abraham's family even before the Torah was written. For Isaac told Jacob what had happened, and Jacob told his sons. Once the Torah was written for the descendants of Jacob, the story was publicized throughout the world, where there were those who believed and those who did not. But today, some years after the end of idol worship, most of the world believes in the Torah of Moses and the stories in it. They dispute with us only about the commandments, calling them metaphorical. Since most of the world believes in this great story, it bears witness that our father Abraham loved God with a complete and

[K] Our texts of Kimhi's comment differ slightly, but it seems clear that this is the verse he is citing.

NAHMANIDES to do can be called a test from his perspective. The Tester, however, is simply commanding him to turn the potential into the actual, so that he can be rewarded for his good deed and not merely for good intentions. But you must understand that "the LORD examines the righteous man" (Ps. 11:5) when He knows quite well that the righteous man will do His will. He gives him a command that will put him to the test and prove his

IBN EZRA that there are two different kinds of knowledge—knowledge of the future before it comes into being and knowledge of what is already in existence. This explains how God could "test" Abraham (and see also "now I know" of v. 12). Saadia said putting Abraham to the test here meant displaying his righteousness to all humanity; he also understands "now I know" of v. 12 as if it meant "now I have made known." Didn't he realize that when Abraham bound Isaac not even Abraham's two servants were present? Others say "offer him" of v. 2 really means "bring him up the mountain," and claim that would be sufficient for him to be considered a burnt offering, since the Hebrew word for that literally means "an offering that goes up." But somehow Abraham did not understand the hidden meaning of this prophecy and hastened to slaughter him—at which point the Holy One told him, "That is not what I meant!" Still others think that Abraham was told, "Demonstrate that you are bringing him up the mountain," as Jeremiah was told to "give [the Rechabites] wine to drink" (Jer. 35:2) even though he knew they would not drink it. These geniuses had to come up with explanations of this kind because they were sure the Holy One could not issue a command and then say, "Don't do it." They have forgotten that originally it was the first-born who were selected for divine service, and then a year later they were replaced by the Levites. **[K]** Since the text says in plain Hebrew that "God put Abraham to the test," that puts paid to all these arguments. God tested him in order for him to receive a reward. As for "now I know," see my comment on "if not, I will take note" (18:21). I intend to explain more of this mystery in my comment to "I have singled you out by name" (Exod. 33:12), with

[K] See Numbers 3.

RASHBAM told" about Milcah's children "some time later" (v. 20), that is, after the birth of Isaac described in ch. 21. In the book of Esther, it was only "some time after" Mordecai uncovered the assassination plot and saved King Ahasuerus that "King Ahasuerus promoted Haman" (Esther 3:1). Haman, of course, wanted to kill Mordecai, but (he having saved the king) it was Haman who was hanged instead. Our story too occurred "some time after" the covenant between Abimelech and Abraham (which extended to their sons and grandsons) in the previous chapter. In 21:30, Abraham gives seven ewes to Abimelech, which enraged the Holy One. For Philistia is part of the land of Israel, where the Holy One commanded, "you shall not let a soul remain alive" (Deut. 20:16). Joshua eventually cast lots to distribute the districts of "the five lords of the Philistines" (Josh. 13:13). That is why **God put Abraham to the test**. That is, He "tried" Abraham, putting him through a grueling, painful experience. "You are so proud of the son I gave you that you made a covenant between your sons and theirs? Now offer him up as a burnt offering and let's see what good all your covenant-making does you." A better translation might be "God contended with Abraham." Compare the use of this verb in Exod. 17:7, Ps. 26:2, and Job 4:2.

After coming up with this explanation, I found precisely the same reason given in Midrash Samuel: "You gave him seven ewes? I swear that his descendants will make war seven times on your descendants, and beat them every time." Another reading: "I swear that his descendants will kill seven of the most righteous of your descendants." And here they are: Samson, Hophni and Phinehas, and Saul and his three sons. **[F]** Another reading: "I swear that his descendants will destroy seven sacred locales." And they are: the Tent of Meeting, and those at Gilgal, Nob, Gibeon, Shiloh, and Jerusalem (twice). Another reading: "The Ark

[F] See Judges 16, 1 Samuel 4, and 1 Samuel 31, respectively.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS when Abraham thought his troubles were over (Abarbanel). **God put Abraham to the test**. This was to forestall Satan or anyone else who might say to God (as Satan did in Job 1:9–10), "Does Abraham not have good reason to fear God? Why, it is You who have fenced him round, him and his household and all that he has." He is even making treaties with kings! (Bekhor Shor). Rather, "God had held up Abraham as a banner," giving him the best of everything (Abarbanel). Remember that the purpose of man's existence is to resemble his Creator as much as possible. As we know from 1:26, man was created "in our image, after our likeness" (Sforno). "**Abraham.**" Saying it just once, not twice as in v. 11; this conversation was a calm one (Abarbanel).

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NJPS "Here I am." [2]And He said, "Take your son, your favored one, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the heights that

OJPS he said: "Here am I." [2]And He said: "Take now thy son, thine only son, whom thou lovest, even Isaac, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt-offering upon one of the mountains which I will

אַבְרָהָם וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּנִי׃ 2 וַיֹּאמֶר קַח־נָא
אֶת־בִּנְךָ אֶת־יְחִידְךָ אֲשֶׁר־אָהַבְתָּ אֶת־
יִצְחָק וְלֶךְ־לְךָ אֶל־אֶרֶץ הַמֹּרִיָּה וְהַעֲלֵהוּ
שָׁם לְעֹלָה עַל אַחַד הֶהָרִים אֲשֶׁר אֹמַר

RASHI before Me,' I would not resist." **Here I am**. This is how the pious reply to a divine summons. It expresses humility and readiness to serve.

2 Take. The *na* missing in NJPS (see "take now" of OJPS) is actually a word that means "please." "Please stand by Me in this test, so that people will not say, 'The earlier tests did not really challenge him.'" **Your son**. "But I have two sons." **Your favored one**. Rather, your "only" one (OJPS). Abraham responded, "Each is the only son of his mother." **Isaac, whom you love**. The Hebrew reads, "whom you love—Isaac" (compare OJPS). Abraham responded to the first phrase, "I love both my sons." Finally the Holy One said straight out: "Isaac." And why did He not say this immediately? In order not to give Abraham a sudden shock that might unsettle his reason; in order to involve Abraham emotionally in the importance of the commandment; and to give him reward for each phrase of the commandment individually. **The land of Moriah**. Jerusalem: "Then Solomon began to build the House of the LORD in Jerusalem on Mount Moriah" (2 Chron. 3:1). The Sages link the name to the fact that "teaching" (*hora'ah*) went forth from that site to all Israel; Onkelos links it to the myrrh (*mor*) that was used in the incense service. **And offer him there**. He did not say "slaughter him" but merely (as the Hebrew literally says) "bring him up there." **As a burnt offering**. Again, the Hebrew says nothing about "burnt," merely that he is to be offered "up." The Holy One did not want Abraham to slaughter him, merely to bring him up the mountain as an offering. Once he brought him up the mountain, He told him to bring him back down. **On one of the heights that I will point out to you**. The Holy One keeps the righteous in the dark for a while before enlightening them, in order to grant them greater

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why does God command, "Take your son" (v. 2), but turn the order into a request with "please," the Hebrew word left untranslated by NJPS? ✦ Why call him "your son, your favored one . . . whom you love" (as the Hebrew word order has it) instead of simply Isaac? As it is, the text has left an opening for the Muslims to claim that it was Ishmael who was bound. ✦ Why say "go you" (compare OJPS), using the same language as in 12:1? It certainly cannot be interpreted here to mean "go for your own good and profit"! ✦ Why was Abraham commanded to do this on Mount Moriah rather than at home or at least in his own city? ✦ Since God tells him specifically to "offer him there as a burnt offering," how can the Sages claim that "they have built shrines to burn their sons and daughters in fire—which I never commanded, which never came to My mind" (Jer. 7:31) refers to Isaac? ✦ Why does God say "on one of the heights that I will point out to you" without telling him which one?

RASHBAM of the LORD remained in the territory of the Philistines seven months" (1 Sam. 6:1).

2 The land of Moriah. Another name for "the land of Amoriah," the land of the Amorites. The letter א is frequently omitted, e.g., "No Arab shall *pitch his tent* there" (Isa. 13:20); see also Exod. 10:21.

IBN EZRA the help of God, who knows the hidden things.

2 One of the heights. The one on which the Temple was built: "Solomon built the House on Mount Moriah." **[L]** It is not a high mountain. That is where "the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite" (2 Sam. 24:18) was.

[L] Ibn Ezra's quotation, as we have it, combines the beginning of 1 Kings 6:14 with "Mount Moriah" of 2 Chron. 3:1.

KIMHI perfect love, which everyone ought to learn from him. **He said to him**. As v. 3 makes clear, He said this to him in a dream.

2 Go to the land of Moriah. Jerusalem and its region were called Moriah, which is why the mountain on which the threshing floor of Araunah was located was called Mount Moriah. But the text does not tell us why Moriah was called by that name. **On one of the heights that I will point out to you**. This too was meant to demonstrate Abraham's love of God. Again he does not question or challenge Him. It was to be done there to show Abraham the place where in the future the Temple, with its sacrificial altar, would be built, and to inaugurate

NAHMANIDES righteousness. But He never examines the wicked (who would not obey) in this way. So all the tests described in the Torah are really for the benefit of the one being tested.

2 Take your son, your favored one. Literally, your "only" one (OJPS): the only son of the mistress of the household and the only one through whom "offspring shall be continued" (21:12) for Abraham. **Isaac, whom you love**. This whole command is framed in such a way as to make it seem something grand. **Go to the land of Moriah**. Rashi's comment would seem to demand that this is "the land that *will be* the land of Moriah," or at least that it already had that name because of what lay in its future. Genesis Rabbah does indeed quote "I will betake me to the mount of myrrh [*mor*]" (Song 4:6) with reference to this mountain. But Onkelos's mention of the temple service can hardly be about myrrh. That is just one of the spices used in just one of the aspects of the temple service. If Onkelos wanted to hint at an allusion to myrrh he could certainly have said "the land of incense." He quite clearly meant "the land where they would serve God." He had the same thing in mind as did Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer, which says: "He pointed at the altar and told Abraham, 'This is the altar where Adam brought his offerings, where Cain and Abel brought their offerings, and where Noah and his sons brought their offerings.' For 'Abraham built the altar' [v. 9, OJPS]. Not '*an* altar,' but '*the* altar'—the altar where the ancestors brought their offerings." And he derived the name Moriah from *mora*, "fear," because they feared God there, and worshiped Him. But the correct understanding of the straightforward sense is that, as the Sages said, it comes from "the mount of myrrh [*mor*]" of Song 4:6 because "myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon" (Prov. 7:17) are found on that mountain. (Rabbinic literature assures us that cinnamon grew in the land of Israel and that goats and

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **2 Your favored one**. Rather, your "only" one (see OJPS); Ishmael had been cast out and was gone (Abarbanel). **Offer him there as a burnt offering**. Rather, "offer him up as an offering." The Holy One was deliberately being obscure, but once Abraham had taken Isaac up the mountain, he had completely fulfilled this commandment (Bekhor Shor). He said, "Sovereign of the Universe! Can there be a burnt offering without a priest?" The Holy One replied, "I have made you a priest already! 'The LORD has sworn and will not relent, "You are a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek"' [Ps. 110:4]" (Hizkuni). The purpose was to have Abraham educate Isaac about the proper way to serve God; the nature of the test was to have Abraham find the command to sacrifice his son so difficult that he would realize it could be understood differently. If he found the command easy to fulfill, he would not try to figure out some other meaning (Gersonides). The Holy One deliberately spoke ambiguously; He wanted Abraham to misunderstand and attempt to slaughter Isaac (Abarbanel). **On one of the heights that I will point out to you**. Rather, "which I will tell you" (compare

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NJPS I will point out to you." [3]So early next morning, Abraham saddled his ass and took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. He split the wood for the burnt offering, and he set out for the place of which God had told him. [4]On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place from afar. [5]Then Abraham said to his servants, "You stay here with the ass. The boy and I will go up there; we will worship and we will return to you."

אֵלֶיךָ׃ [3] וַיַּשְׁכֵּם אַבְרָהָם בַּבֹּקֶר וַיַּחֲבֹשׁ אֶת־חֲמֹרוֹ וַיִּקַּח אֶת־שְׁנֵי נְעָרָיו אִתּוֹ וְאֶת יִצְחָק בְּנוֹ וַיְבַקַּע עֲצֵי עֹלָה וַיָּקָם וַיֵּלֶךְ אֶל־הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר־אָמַר־לוֹ הָאֱלֹהִים׃ [4] בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי וַיִּשָּׂא אַבְרָהָם אֶת־עֵינָיו וַיַּרְא אֶת־הַמָּקוֹם מֵרָחֹק׃ [5] וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָהָם אֶל־נְעָרָיו שְׁבוּ־לָכֶם פֹּה עִם־הַחֲמוֹר וַאֲנִי וְהַנַּעַר נֵלְכָה עַד־כֹּה וְנִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה וְנָשׁוּבָה אֲלֵיכֶם׃

OJPS tell thee of." [3]And Abraham rose early in the morning, and saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son; and he cleaved the wood for the burnt-offering, and rose up, and went unto the place of which God had told him. [4]On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes, and saw the place afar off. [5]And Abraham said unto his young men: "Abide ye here with the ass, and I and the lad will go yonder; and we will worship, and come back to you."

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why must the Torah tell us pointless things like "Abraham saddled his ass" (v. 3)? Do we really care whether Abraham did this himself or had someone do it for him, or about any of the other such details that we are given?

RASHI reward: "Go forth from your native land and from your father's house to the land that I will show you" (12:1). The same happened to Jonah: "Go at once to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it what I tell you" (Jon. 3:2).

3 Early next morning. He performed the commandment with alacrity. **Abraham saddled his ass.** He himself, not commanding one of his servants to do it. Love overturns protocol. **Two of his servants.** Ishmael and Eliezer. An important man should not travel without at least two attendants, so that if one must turn aside to answer the call of nature he still has another with him. **He split the wood.** More precisely, he "chopped" the wood. Notice the unusual Aramaic verb Onkelos uses here.

4 On the third day. Why did He delay and not simply tell him immediately where the place was? So that people should not say, "He addled him so that he could not think straight. If Abraham had had a chance to think about it, he would never have done it." **Abraham looked up and saw the place from afar.** He saw a cloud wrapped around the top of the mountain.

5 Up there. The Hebrew phrase *ad koh* implies "just a little further in the same direction." Compare "yonder" of OJPS. But the

IBN EZRA **3 He split the wood for the burnt offering.** And loaded it on the ass.

4 On the third day. After leaving Beer-sheba.

5 We will return to you. Some ask how Abraham could have possibly said this; others say he intended to bring Isaac's bones back with him. But Abraham was simply saying this to them so they would not

KIMHI the place with a most precious and beloved life. For even though the act was not completed and he was not slaughtered, God accepted the offering as if it had been made.

3 Early next morning. He did not tell Sarah, fearing she might do herself some harm out of her love for Isaac. **Two of his servants.** The two who regularly went along with him to attend him. **He split the wood for the burnt offering.** The young men thought the wood was to cook with when they stopped for the night, in case they should not find wood there. **He set out for the place of which God had told him.** The land of Moriah. He did not yet know which particular mountain he was going to.

4 On the third day Abraham looked up. Literally, "On the third day *and* Abraham looked up." This is standard syntax in Biblical Hebrew. But it is possible to explain the text as saying, "he got to the place [compare OJPS to v. 3] . . . on the third day, and Abraham lifted up his eyes." **And saw the place from afar.** Now that he was in the land of Moriah, he could see the place, though he still did not know which mountain was the one.

5 You stay here with the ass. A midrash says: He saw a pillar of fire on the mountain. "Isaac," he said, "do you see anything on any of the mountains?" Isaac replied, "I see something like a fire." Abraham said to Ishmael and Eliezer, "Do you see anything on any of the

NAHMANIDES gazelles grazed on it.) But it may have had that name as a way of praising the land of Israel. **[O]** Now here it is the land that is called Moriah; in 2 Chron. 3:1, it is the mountain alone that is called Moriah. Perhaps the place **[P]** was named after the mountain, meaning that Abraham knew the land he was going to but not which particular mountain. The reason he was told to offer Isaac on that particular mountain is that this was "the mountain God desired as His dwelling" (Ps. 68:17), and so He wanted the merit of the Binding to be connected forever with the sacrifices that would be offered there in the future. This is why Abraham called it "Adonai-yireh" (v. 14)—"the Lord will see." Moreover, Abraham's righteousness was so great that the Holy One wished to put him to some trouble and to delay for three days. Had he done it at once, his action would have been hurried and rushed, but after a three-day journey it would clearly have been done in a state of calm consideration. As R. Akiva puts it in Genesis Rabbah, "No one would be able to say, 'He got him so confused that he didn't know what he was doing.'"

3 He split the wood for the burnt offering. Out of his eagerness to prepare for the commandment, in case they did not find wood for the offering where it was needed. So he carried it on the three-day journey. Or Abraham may have followed the Torah law that wood in which a worm is found cannot be used for a sacrificial offering. So he brought wood from home that he knew could be used.

4 Abraham looked up and saw the place from afar. He saw a cloud wrapped around the top of the mountain, which fulfilled "that I will point out to you" (v. 2). But the straightforward sense may simply be that "the place" he saw was the land of Moriah, which he recognized.

[O] Some versions of Nahmanides' comment say "in praise of [the People of] Israel." **[P]** Our texts say "the city."

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS OJPS). Since in v. 3 Abraham "set out for the place of which God had told him," He clearly did tell him where to go. That is how, in v. 4, Abraham "saw the place from afar" (Bekhor Shor).

3 Early next morning, Abraham saddled his ass and took with him two of his servants. He did not summon them or tell them to pack, he just took them. He did not want to arouse suspicion. For the same reason, he took only his own ass and none of the others, which would have been missed (Abarbanel).

5 You stay here with the ass. He did not want to take them along lest they prevent him from slaughtering his son (Bekhor Shor). He

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NJPS 6Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and put it on his son Isaac. He himself took the firestone and the knife; and the two walked off together. 7Then Isaac said to his father Abraham, "Father!" And he answered, "Yes, my son." And he said, "Here are the firestone and the wood; but where is the sheep for the burnt offering?" 8And Abraham said, "God will see to the sheep for His burnt offering, my son." And the two of them walked on together.

9They arrived at the place of which God

OJPS 6And Abraham took the wood of the burnt-offering, and laid it upon Isaac his son; and he took in his hand the fire and the knife; and they went both of them together. 7And Isaac spoke unto Abraham his father, and said: "My father." And he said: "Here am I, my son." And he said: "Behold the fire and the wood; but where is the lamb for a burnt-offering?" 8And Abraham said: "God will provide Himself the lamb for a burnt-offering, my son." So they went both of them together.

9And they came to the place which God

6 וַיִּקַּח אַבְרָהָם אֶת־עֲצֵי הָעֹלָה וַיָּשֶׂם
עַל־יִצְחָק בְּנוֹ וַיִּקַּח בְּיָדוֹ אֶת־הָאֵשׁ וְאֶת־
הַמַּאֲכֶלֶת וַיֵּלְכוּ שְׁנֵיהֶם יַחְדָּו׃ 7 וַיֹּאמֶר
יִצְחָק אֶל־אַבְרָהָם אָבִיו וַיֹּאמֶר אָבִי
וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֶּנִּי בְנִי וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּה הָאֵשׁ
וְהָעֵצִים וְאַיֵּה הַשֶּׂה לְעֹלָה׃ 8 וַיֹּאמֶר
אַבְרָהָם אֱלֹהִים יִרְאֶה־לּוֹ הַשֶּׂה לְעֹלָה
בְּנִי וַיֵּלְכוּ שְׁנֵיהֶם יַחְדָּו׃
9 וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶל־הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר אָמַר־לוֹ

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why are we told twice that "the two walked off together" (vv. 6 and 8)? ✦ What led the Sages to make the implausible claim that this was the same ass that Moses rode, and that eventually the King Messiah himself will ride on? ✦ Why does Abraham take "the wood for the burnt offering" with him, knowing as he does that there are plenty of trees on Mount Moriah? ✦ Why does Isaac say, "Here are the firestone and the wood; but where is the sheep for the burnt offering" (v. 7)? Mightn't the firestone and the wood be for some other purpose? And couldn't they acquire a sheep on the way? ✦ Why doesn't Isaac mention the knife? ✦ Why didn't Isaac ask his question as soon as they left home? ✦ When Isaac asks, "Where is the sheep?" why doesn't Abraham tell him the truth?

RASHI midrash notes an allusion to what the Holy One had told him: "So [*koh*] shall your offspring be" (15:5). Abraham thought, "Let's see what becomes of this '*koh*.'" **We will return to you.** He prophesied that in fact both of them would return.

6 The knife. The unusual Hebrew word used here comes from the root that means "to eat." This is a regular Biblical Hebrew metaphor: "My sword *devours* flesh" (Deut. 32:42). And of course a knife actually is used to prepare flesh for eating through kosher slaughter. Another reading: the knife here is called an "eater" because the Jews "consume" the reward for Abraham's willingness to use it. **The two walked off together.** Abraham, who knew that he was going to slaughter his son, walked along of his own free will, as happily as Isaac, who had no idea what was about to happen.

RASHBAM **6 The knife.** The unusual Hebrew word used here comes from the root that means "to eat." This is a regular Biblical Hebrew metaphor: "My sword *devours* flesh" (Deut. 32:42).

IBN EZRA leave before he came back, and so Isaac would not realize what was happening and run away.

9 He bound his son Isaac. Our Sages say Isaac was 37 years old when he was bound, and if this is our tradition we accept it. But logic says this cannot be correct. If it were so, Isaac's righteousness should also be emphasized here. His reward ought to have been double that of his father, for willingly offering himself for slaughter. But there is not the slightest thing in the text about

8 God will see to the sheep. He will provide the sheep. **For His burnt offering, my son.** And if there is no sheep, His burnt offering will be my son. **And the two of them walked on together.** Now Isaac too understood that he was going to be slaughtered. Yet he still walked on as willingly as his father.

9 He bound his son Isaac. He bound his hands and feet behind him. Tying the hands and feet together in this way is the technical

KIMHI mountains?" They replied, "No." He said, "Since you and the ass both see nothing, you stay here with the ass." But the midrash reads it not as *im ha-ḥamor*, "with the ass," but as *am ha-ḥamor*, "ass-people." **We will worship.** Now the servants understood that the firestone and the knife were because he intended to offer sacrifice. Most people who went somewhere to worship did bring a sacrifice, as we are told of Samuel's father Elkanah, who "used to go up from his town every year to worship and to offer sacrifice" (1 Sam. 1:3).

6 Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and put it on his son Isaac. He did not take the ass, because he did not want the servants to think they were going far. Nor would there be anyone to look after the ass while they were doing the deed. And of course he did not want to bring the ass to such a holy place.

8 God will see to the sheep for His burnt offering, my son. He answered ambiguously. "My son" might be addressing Isaac, or it might be in apposition to "His burnt offering." Isaac understood it the second way, which is why the text continues: **And the two of them walked on together.** They were of one mind about it. The son lovingly acquiesced in offering his life to God as a sacrifice.

9 They arrived at the place of which God had told him. Mount Moriah. When they arrived there, He told him so and showed it to him in a prophetic vision. The midrash that He showed him a pillar of fire (or a cloud wrapped around the top of the mountain)

NAHMANIDES **9 They arrived at the place of which God had told him.** "Now, this is Mount Moriah." He told him, "This is the mountain I told you about."

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS did not want to tell them what was happening because he himself was not yet sure how things would turn out (Gersonides).

7 Here are the firestone and the wood; but where is the sheep for the burnt offering? We learn that Abraham regularly offered sacrifice, and that Isaac had seen him doing so (Gersonides). He did not ask about the knife, since people carry swords and knives for protection (Abarbanel).

8 God will see to the sheep for His burnt offering, my son. Abraham knew that "it is through Isaac that offspring shall be continued for you" (21:12), but he was still afraid that Isaac might be slaughtered. He thought, "He might already have slept with a woman and produced a son or daughter." Isaac was already 37 years old, remember (Hizkuni). Rather, "May God see to the sheep for His burnt offering, son." It was a prayer (Gersonides). **And the two of them walked on together.** If Isaac was now fully aware of what was to happen, why does only Abraham get the credit? Because Isaac would have only a few moments of pain and fear, while Abraham would live unceasingly with it, before, during, and after the event for the rest of his life. But the text would certainly have told us if Isaac had known he was to be slaughtered, and would have praised him. In fact, he had no idea what Abraham was planning (Abarbanel).

9 Abraham built an altar there. Isaac did not help build it. His father kept him safely out of harm's way so that Satan could not

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NJPS had told him. Abraham built an altar there; he laid out the wood; he bound his son Isaac; he laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. 10And Abraham picked up the knife to slay his son. 11Then an angel of the LORD called to him from heaven: "Abraham! Abraham!" And he answered, "Here I am." 12And he said, "Do not raise your hand against the boy, or do anything to him. For now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld

OJPS had told him of; and Abraham built the altar there, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar, upon the wood. 10And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son. 11And the angel of the LORD called unto him out of heaven, and said: "Abraham, Abraham." And he said: "Here am I." 12And he said: "Lay not thy hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him; for now I know that thou art a God-fearing man, seeing thou hast not withheld thy

הָאֱלֹהִים וַיִּבֶן שָׁם אַבְרָהָם אֶת־הַמִּזְבֵּחַ
וַיַּעֲרֹךְ אֶת־הָעֵצִים וַיַּעֲקֹד אֶת־יִצְחָק בְּנוֹ
וַיָּשֶׂם אֹתוֹ עַל־הַמִּזְבֵּחַ מִמַּעַל לָעֵצִים׃
10 וַיִּשְׁלַח אַבְרָהָם אֶת־יָדוֹ וַיִּקַּח אֶת־
הַמַּאֲכֶלֶת לִשְׁחֹט אֶת־בְּנוֹ׃ 11 וַיִּקְרָא אֵלָיו
מַלְאַךְ יְהוָה מִן־הַשָּׁמַיִם וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָהָם |
אַבְרָהָם וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּנִי׃ 12 וַיֹּאמֶר אַל־
תִּשְׁלַח יָדְךָ אֶל־הַנַּעַר וְאַל־תַּעַשׂ לוֹ
מְאוּמָה כִּי | עַתָּה יָדַעְתִּי כִּי־יְרֵא אֱלֹהִים
אַתָּה וְלֹא חָשַׂכְתָּ אֶת־בִּנְךָ אֶת־יְחִידְךָ

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why is it "God" who issues the command of v. 2 but only "an angel" (v. 11) who tells Abraham not to do it? ✦ How could Abraham suddenly be told, "Do not raise your hand against the boy" (v. 12)? "God is not man to be capricious, or mortal to change His mind" (Num. 23:19)! ✦ If God's command in v. 2 was really, as one might take the Hebrew, to "offer him up as an offering" but not to slaughter him, how could Abraham have made such a mistake? Do prophets misunderstand their instructions? That would cast all religion into profound doubt. ✦ How could Abraham "do anything to him" without raising his hand against him? ✦ How is it possible for the text to say, "for now I know," as if previously God did *not* know? ✦ The verb phrase literally says, "now I knew." How is this contradiction to be reconciled? ✦ Didn't this action really show that Abraham *loved* God, not that he feared Him? ✦ What precisely did Abraham do that showed his fear of God? Hadn't he demonstrated his fear of God long ago? ✦ Why is the Holy One always referred to as "God" before Abraham picks up the knife, but afterward as "the LORD"? (V. 12 is not an exception; to "fear God" is an idiom.)

RASHI definition of "binding." That is why the "streaked" goats of 30:35 are literally called "bound." They had a strip of white at the ankles, as if identifying the location in which their legs would be bound.

11 Abraham! Abraham! Repeating the name affectionately.

12 Do not raise your hand against the boy. To slaughter him. "You mean I've come here for no reason? Let me make a tiny wound on him and draw a bit of blood." **Or do anything to him.** Do not do the slightest thing (*me'umah*) to him. Do not make the slightest blemish (*mum*). **For now I know.** Said R. Abba: Abraham told him, "Let me think out loud before You. The other day You told me, 'It is through Isaac that offspring shall be continued for you' [21:12]. Then You said, 'Take your son' [v. 2]. Now You tell me, 'Do not raise your hand against the boy'!" The Holy One said to him, "'I will not violate My covenant, or change what I have uttered' [Ps. 89:35]. I told you, 'Take,' and I would not change what I have uttered. I did not tell you to slaughter him, just to take him 'up' the mountain. So 'now I know' what to reply to Satan and to the other nations who wonder why I love you so much. I have a ready answer now, for they can all see **that you fear God.**"

RASHBAM **12 For now I know that you fear God.** Now I see, and it is publicized to all the world, that you fear God.

IBN EZRA Isaac. Others say he was 5 years old, which is likewise impossible—he carried "the wood for the burnt offering" (v. 6). The most plausible scenario is that he was close to 13 years old, and that his father forced him, unwillingly, to be bound. The fact that his father concealed what was happening from him proves this: "God will see to the sheep for His burnt offering, my son" (v. 8). If he had said, "You are the burnt offering," he might have run away.

11 Abraham! Abraham! Twice, as if in haste.

KIMHI that I mentioned in my comments to v. 5 takes showing him this as the equivalent of telling him. **He laid out the wood.** On top of the fire, to set it alight. **He bound his son Isaac.** He bound him hand and foot so he could not kick. Even though Isaac was offering himself willingly to be bound and sacrificed, he was afraid the desire to resist might overcome him. So he told his father to tie him good and tight.

10 And Abraham picked up the knife to slay his son. One slaughters the sacrifice on the altar first, after which the fire consumes it.

11 Then an angel of the LORD called to him from heaven. That is, he heard the voice but saw nothing.

12 Do not raise your hand against the boy, or do anything to him. The repetition was to ensure that there would be no misunderstanding. **For now I know.** The verb in this conjugation never means "to make known." I believe the meaning here is the same as in "I have singled you out by name" (as NJPS translates Exod. 33:17). What it means is that the particular has returned to the whole. That is enough to explain it to those who understand. It ought not be clarified any more than this. **That you fear God.** This was a fear that was really love. For it was not a physical fear but a spiritual one, a fear that his soul would perish from the World to Come.

NAHMANIDES **12 Now I know that you fear God.** Abraham's fear of God had previously been potential and had not been actualized. Now it was made known by this great deed, his merit was displayed in full, and he would have "a full recompense from the LORD, the God of Israel" (Ruth 2:12). What the passage is saying is that it was God who tested Abraham by commanding him to bind his son and an angel of the Lord who prevented him and gave him the promise of blessing. This will be explained in my comment to 48:15.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS arrange an accident that would blemish him, making him unfit for sacrifice (Hizkuni). He had to rebuild the old altar, which had fallen into ruin (Abarbanel). **He laid out the wood**; **he bound his son Isaac**; **he laid him on the altar**, **on top of the wood.** Isaac thought Abraham was showing him what to do. It was not until Abraham picked up the knife that Isaac realized that Abraham was serious (Abarbanel).

11 Abraham! Abraham! Repeating the name as one does when calling urgently; we do the same in French (Hizkuni). Clearly Abraham was rejoicing in being able to fulfill God's commandment. Prophecy could not have come to him at all (let alone wide-awake prophecy) if he was upset or depressed (Gersonides).

12 Do not raise your hand against the boy. You have already fulfilled the commandment. You were told to offer him "up," and you have done so by bringing him up above the tree line (Bekhor Shor). **Now I know.** Up until now I made as if I did not know (Bekhor Shor). I, the angel, know that God was justified in exalting you over us angels (Sforno). **Since you have not withheld your son, your favored one, from Me.** Rather, "You have not withheld your son, your favored one. [You fear God more, and are of higher rank,] *than* Me" (Sforno).

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NJPS your son, your favored one, from Me." 13When Abraham looked up, his eye fell upon a ram, caught in the thicket by its horns. So Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering in place of his son. 14And Abraham named that site Adonai-yireh, whence the present saying, "On the mount of the LORD there is vision."

מִמֶּנִּי׃ 13 וַיִּשָּׂא אַבְרָהָם אֶת־עֵינָיו וַיַּרְא וְהִנֵּה־אַיִל אַחַר* נֶאֱחַז בַּסְּבָךְ בְּקַרְנָיו וַיֵּלֶךְ אַבְרָהָם וַיִּקַּח אֶת־הָאַיִל וַיַּעֲלֵהוּ לְעֹלָה תַּחַת בְּנוֹ׃ 14 וַיִּקְרָא אַבְרָהָם שֵׁם־ הַמָּקוֹם הַהוּא יְהוָה | יִרְאֶה אֲשֶׁר יֵאָמֵר הַיּוֹם בְּהַר יְהוָה יֵרָאֶה׃

v. 13. בנוסח אחר "אחד"

RASHI **13 His eye fell upon a ram.** Made ready for precisely this purpose during the six days of creation. **Caught in the thicket.** NJPS omits an important word, translated "behind him" by OJPS. But the Hebrew says simply, "after." Abraham saw this ram caught in the thicket only *after* the angel told him, "Do not raise your hand against the boy" (v. 12). Onkelos makes this point explicit in his translation. "Thicket" simply means "branches." It was caught by its horns because it was running toward Abraham when Satan entangled it in the underbrush in order to stop it. **And offered it up as a burnt offering in place of his son.** Once we are told that Abraham "offered it up," what does "in place of his son" add? That at each step of the procedure he would pray, "May this offering be accepted before You as if it were my own son who had been slaughtered, as if it were his blood being thrown on the altar, as if his hide were flayed, as if it was his hide being turned into smoke and ash." So this sacrifice was literally made "instead [see OJPS] of his son."

14 Adonai-yireh. Literally, "the Lord will see." Onkelos clarifies the straightforward sense of the expression: "The Lord will see that this place is chosen for Him to rest His Presence upon it, so that sacrifices can be offered there." **Whence the present saying.** Rather, "it will be said in the days of future generations, 'The Lord appears to His people on this mountain.'" "To this day" of OJPS is literally "today," referring in this case to future days, like the common biblical phrase in which the Hebrew literally does say "to this day." All the generations to come that read this verse (or the others where the similar expression is used) will say "today," meaning their own times. But a midrash reads our verse differently: May the Lord see this binding as a reason to forgive Israel every year and to save them from punishment, so that "on this day" in all future generations "it will be said, '**On the mount of the LORD there is** visible'" the dust of Isaac, heaped on the altar to provide permanent atonement.

KIMHI **13 Abraham looked up.** Hoping to see some animal fit for sacrifice, near or far, that he might offer instead of his son. **His eye fell upon a ram, caught in the thicket by its horns.** It was a miracle from God, on Abraham's behalf, that this ram strayed so far from the rest of the flock without the shepherd noticing. If Abraham had found the shepherd he would of course have paid for the ram; he would not have offered it up to the Lord without paying for it.

14 Adonai-yireh. "The Lord will see," a reference to "God will see to the sheep" (v. 8). **Whence the present saying, "On the mount of the LORD there is vision."** Rather, Abraham is saying, "This day [compare OJPS] will be said of, spoken of, when the Lord appears on this mountain." When the altar and the Temple are built here, this day on which I offered up my son Isaac will be told of." For he was told prophetically why that mountain had been chosen: His descendants would one day bring sacrificial offerings there.

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ What made Abraham think he was supposed to offer up the ram (v. 13) as a replacement for his son? Presumably this ram had an owner, so Abraham would be offering up a stolen sacrifice. ✦ Where does Abraham come off announcing that "the Lord will see," which is what "Adonai-yireh" (v. 14) literally means? ✦ Why is that site not actually called "Adonai-yireh," neither in 2 Chron. 3:1 (where it is called "Mount Moriah") nor anywhere else?

OJPS son, thine only son, from Me." 13And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold behind him a ram caught in the thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt-offering in the stead of his son. 14And Abraham called the name of that place Adonai-jireh; as it is said to this day: "In the mount where the LORD is seen."

RASHBAM **13 When Abraham looked up, his eye fell upon a ram, caught in the thicket by its horns.** NJPS has omitted the word translated "behind him" by OJPS, which really means "afterward." Here is the correct interpretation of the verse: Abraham looked up, and his eye fell on a ram passing by, after which he saw that the ram, in passing, had been caught in the thicket by its horns. He thought, "This angel who was sent to me by the Holy One must certainly have arranged to have this ram substitute for my son. That is why it got caught—so I could catch it and sacrifice it." The Hebrew word, ordinarily a preposition as in vv. 1 and 20, is found elsewhere as an adverb, the way it is used in our verse: *"Afterward* Moses and Aaron went and said to Pharaoh" (Exod. 5:1); see also Ps. 68:26 and Eccles. 12:2.

14 Whence the present saying. Present and future. **On the mount of the LORD there is vision.** Rather, "on the mountain where the LORD appears"—where the Holy One appeared to Abraham.

IBN EZRA **13 Caught in the thicket.** NJPS omits a word: *"after* it was caught in the thicket." (If "caught" is a participle rather than a perfect, the meaning is not really different: "after it was being caught." There are many such cases.) Some say *aḥar* means that "Abraham looked up *afterward*," but it would have to say *aḥar-ken* or *aḥarei-ken* for it to mean that. The word *aḥar* by itself is not used that way.

14 Whence the present saying, "On the mount of the LORD there is vision." See my introductory comments to Deuteronomy 1.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **13 Abraham went and took the ram.** He would not have taken it, fearing that it belonged to someone else, but once he saw it get caught in the thicket, he realized that was a sign that he should take it (Bekhor Shor). All these details are meant to convince us of the truth of the story (Gersonides). **And offered it up as a burnt offering in place of his son.** It was a replacement, not an offering of thanksgiving for the Holy One's having saved his son (Abarbanel).

14 Abraham named that site Adonai-yireh. Literally, "the Lord will see." The Lord will see to it that people believe I have obeyed His command. I know that people are saying, "'On the mount of the Lord it is seen'—We'll see when they get to the mountain whether Abraham will actually slaughter his son." When they see him coming home with me, they'll say that I "committed a criminal offense, and denied God above" (Job 31:28). They will not believe that God Himself arranged it. But the Holy One will see that I did not rebel against His word, and He will be my witness (Hizkuni). The Hebrew does not mean that he named the place, but that he "called the name" (OJPS) at that place. He prayed that everyone would realize his intention to slaughter his son had been made null and void. That is why v. 15 tells us he was answered "a second time" (Abarbanel). **On the mount of the LORD there is vision.** Rather, "it will be seen" that I built an altar, proving my intent. But both of these verbs may in fact be future forms indicating a past tense (as sometimes happens): "The Lord saw" that I said "God will see to the sheep" (v. 8), and He fulfilled his servant's word (Abarbanel).

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NJPS [15]The angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time from heaven, [16]and said, "By Myself I swear, the LORD declares: Because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your favored one, [17]I will bestow My blessing upon you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars of heaven and the sands on the seashore; and your descendants shall seize the gates of their foes. [18]All the nations of the earth shall bless themselves by your descendants, because you have obeyed My command." [19]Abraham then returned to his servants, and they departed together for Beer-sheba; and Abraham stayed in Beer-sheba.

15 וַיִּקְרָ֤א מַלְאַךְ־יְהוָה֙ אֶל־אַבְרָהָ֔ם שֵׁנִ֖ית
מִן־הַשָּׁמָֽיִם׃ 16 וַיֹּ֗אמֶר בִּ֤י נִשְׁבַּ֙עְתִּי֙ נְאֻם־
יְהוָ֔ה כִּ֥י יַ֙עַן֙ אֲשֶׁ֣ר עָשִׂ֔יתָ אֶת־הַדָּבָ֥ר הַזֶּ֖ה
וְלֹ֣א חָשַׂ֑כְתָּ אֶת־בִּנְךָ֖ אֶת־יְחִידֶֽךָ׃ 17 כִּֽי־
בָרֵ֨ךְ אֲבָרֶכְךָ֜ וְהַרְבָּ֣ה אַרְבֶּ֗ה אֶת־זַרְעֲךָ֙
כְּכוֹכְבֵ֣י הַשָּׁמַ֔יִם וְכַחֹ֖ול אֲשֶׁ֣ר עַל־שְׂפַ֣ת
הַיָּ֑ם וְיִרַ֣שׁ זַרְעֲךָ֔ אֵ֖ת שַׁ֥עַר אֹיְבָֽיו׃
18 וְהִתְבָּרֲכ֣וּ בְזַרְעֲךָ֔ כֹּ֖ל גּוֹיֵ֣י הָאָ֑רֶץ עֵ֕קֶב
אֲשֶׁ֥ר שָׁמַ֖עְתָּ בְּקֹלִֽי׃ 19 וַיָּ֥שָׁב אַבְרָהָ֖ם
אֶל־נְעָרָ֑יו וַיָּקֻ֙מוּ֙ וַיֵּ֣לְכ֔וּ יַחְדָּ֖ו אֶל־בְּאֵ֣ר
שָׁ֑בַע וַיֵּ֥שֶׁב אַבְרָהָ֖ם בִּבְאֵ֥ר שָֽׁבַע׃ פ

OJPS [15]And the angel of the LORD called unto Abraham a second time out of heaven, [16]and said: "By Myself have I sworn, saith the LORD, because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, [17]that in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the seashore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; [18]and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast hearkened to My voice." [19]So Abraham returned unto his young men, and they rose up and went together to Beer-sheba; and Abraham dwelt at Beer-sheba.

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why did the angel have to call to Abraham "a second time from heaven" (v. 15) rather than saying what he had to say all at once? ✦ How can the Lord say, "I will bestow My blessing upon you" and so forth (vv. 17–18) "because you have done this and have not withheld your son" (v. 16)—as if all these blessings had not already been promised to Abraham more than once? ✦ Why must "done this" be explained by the following phrase, which tells us nothing we did not already know? ✦ Similarly, why does "because you have obeyed My command" (v. 18) repeat "because you have done this" (v. 16)? ✦ Why are we told that "Abraham then returned to his servants" (v. 19)? Shouldn't it have said that "Abraham and Isaac returned," as Abraham had promised them in v. 5, and as in fact happened? ✦ Why must v. 19 give us so much detail instead of just telling us that Abraham and the servants "departed for Beer-sheba"? ✦ What does "together" have to do with this? Abraham and the servants are not of the same status.

RASHI **17 I will bestow My blessing upon you.** The Hebrew says "bless" twice: "in blessing I will bless" (OJPS)—once for the father and once for the son. **And make your descendants as numerous.** A similar double verb (see again OJPS), and for the same reason.

19 Abraham stayed in Beer-sheba. He did not literally "settle" there, as the Hebrew might seem to imply. For he had been living in Hebron for only 12 years before the binding of Isaac. So he left Beer-sheba and continued on to Hebron, where he had returned after his 26 years in the land of the Philistines. See again my comment to 21:34.

IBN EZRA **16 By Myself I swear.** This is the most powerful oath, one that lasts forever. **Because.** This particular way of saying "because," *ya'an*, comes from *ya'aneh* ("it will answer"). This deed will answer, will testify.

17 The gates of their foes. That is, cities with gates.

18 Because. The "because" used here, *ekev*, refers to something that comes "on the heels" (another meaning of the word *ekev*) of something else. In this case, what comes "on the heels" of obedience is reward.

19 Abraham then returned to his servants. Isaac is not mentioned because he was still under Abraham's authority. Anyone who says that he did indeed slaughter him and leave him there, but that he came back to life afterward, is saying the opposite of what is written.

KIMHI **15 The angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time.** The reward he had earned for his descendants deserved an utterance of its own.

16 By Myself I swear. God's word is good without an oath. But with the oath, even if Abraham's descendants sinned that would not prevent them from becoming a great people.

17 As numerous as the stars of heaven and the sands on the seashore. As always, the doubling serves to emphasize the point. Abraham has so far been promised both of these things individually, but not both together until now. **Your descendants shall seize the gates of their foes.** That is, the lands of their foes. The gateway into a land is its strong point. A strong land is surrounded by mountains and seas. Once the enemies cross them, the land is as good as conquered: "The gates of your land have opened themselves to your enemies" (Nah. 3:13).

18 All the nations of the earth shall bless themselves. "May God bless us as He blessed the seed of Abraham." **Because you have obeyed My command.** More precisely, "as a reward for your having obeyed My command," in this and in everything else I have commanded you.

NAHMANIDES **16 Because you have done this.** He had already given him the promise repeated in v. 17, to make his descendants as numerous as the stars and as the dust. But now—"because you have done this"—He swore by His great Name. The assurance that "your descendants shall seize the gates of their foes" is also new, a promise that even if his offspring should sin they would not cease to be and would not fall to their enemies and not be able to rise once more. So this is a complete promise of the redemption that awaits us in the future.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **15 From heaven.** This prophecy was from the Separate Intellect, which is related to heaven, not from one of the unclean forces related to earth (Abarbanel).

16 The LORD declares. This phrase, common in the Prophets section, occurs elsewhere in the Torah only in Num. 14:28 (Masorah).

17 As numerous as the stars of heaven and the sands on the seashore. And indeed, as we learn from 1 Kings 4:20, in the time of Solomon "Judah and Israel were as numerous as the sands of the sea" (Hizkuni).

19 Abraham then returned to his servants. And where was Isaac? He must have been hidden away in the Garden of Eden for three years, or else he went to Eber's house to learn Torah (Hizkuni). **And they departed together for Beer-sheba.** Now he was "together" with his servants, revealing to them everything that had happened. But he sent Isaac straight back to Hebron by a different road, to reassure Sarah that all the promises they had been given about Isaac were now more firmly established than ever. Note that when Sarah dies (23:2), Abraham goes to Hebron to mourn for her. There is no mention of Isaac, who was already there (Abarbanel).

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NJPS [20]Some time later, Abraham was told, "Milcah too has borne children to your brother Nahor: [21]Uz the first-born, and Buz his brother, and Kemuel the father of Aram; [22]and Chesed, Hazo, Pildash, Jidlaph, and Bethuel"—[23]Bethuel being the father of Rebekah. These eight Milcah bore to Nahor, Abraham's brother. [24]And his concubine, whose name was Reumah, also bore children: Tebah, Gaham, Tahash, and Maacah.

OJPS [20]And it came to pass after these things, that it was told Abraham, saying: "Behold, Milcah, she also hath borne children unto thy brother Nahor: [21]Uz his first-born, and Buz his brother, and Kemuel the father of Aram; [22]and Chesed, and Hazo, and Pildash, and Jidlaph, and Bethuel." [23]And Bethuel begot Rebekah; these eight did Milcah bear to Nahor, Abraham's brother. [24]And his concubine, whose name was Reumah, she also bore Tebah, and Gaham, and Tahash, and Maacah.

מפטיר

20 וַיְהִי אַחֲרֵי הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה וַיֻּגַּד
לְאַבְרָהָם לֵאמֹר הִנֵּה יָלְדָה מִלְכָּה גַּם־
הִוא בָּנִים לְנָחוֹר אָחִיךָ: 21 אֶת־עוּץ בְּכֹרוֹ
וְאֶת־בּוּז אָחִיו וְאֶת־קְמוּאֵל אֲבִי אֲרָם:
22 וְאֶת־כֶּשֶׂד וְאֶת־חֲזוֹ וְאֶת־פִּלְדָּשׁ וְאֶת־
יִדְלָף וְאֵת בְּתוּאֵל: 23 וּבְתוּאֵל יָלַד אֶת־
רִבְקָה שְׁמֹנָה אֵלֶּה יָלְדָה מִלְכָּה לְנָחוֹר
אֲחִי אַבְרָהָם: 24 וּפִילַגְשׁוֹ וּשְׁמָהּ רְאוּמָה
וַתֵּלֶד גַּם־הִוא אֶת־טֶבַח וְאֶת־גַּחַם וְאֶת־
תַּחַשׁ וְאֶת־מַעֲכָה: ס

RASHI **20 Some time later, Abraham was told.** After he returned from Mount Moriah, Abraham mused, "If my son had actually been slaughtered, he would have died without children. I ought to marry him to one of the daughters of Aner, Eshkol, or Mamre." So the Holy One informed him here that Rebekah (v. 23), Isaac's intended, had been born. That is why Abraham was told this "after these words" (compare OJPS)—after his thoughts prompted by the episode of the binding. **Milcah too.** She "too" will produce 12 tribes like those that would descend from Jacob. And just as Jacob's 12 would consist of eight sons from his wives and four from his concubines, here too Milcah would bear eight (v. 23) and Reumah the concubine four (v. 24).

21 Uz the first-born. This was Job, who came from "the land of Uz" (Job 1:1). **Buz his brother.** "Elihu son of Barachel the Buzite" (Job 32:2).

23 Bethuel being the father of Rebekah. This phrase is the point of this whole genealogy.

KIMHI **20 Some time later.** Some time after the binding of Isaac. **Milcah too has borne children.** Evidently she had ceased bearing as had Sarah, though she was not barren as Sarah was. Besides letting us know about Rebekah, we are told about Nahor's children by Milcah and Reumah out of respect for Abraham.

21 Kemuel the father of Aram. Aram may have been famous. There are many such designations in the book of Chronicles, generally in praise of the one so named. On Aram, and on Uz as well, see my comments to 10:23.

22 Chesed. Ancestor of the Chaldeans. See my comment to "in his native land, Ur of the Chaldeans" (11:28).

23 Bethuel being the father of Rebekah. And of Laban as well, but Rebekah is the one who is important for the story.

NAHMANIDES **20 Milcah too has borne children to your brother Nahor.** Since Milcah was "the daughter of Haran" (11:29), Abraham's brother, he is being informed that his older brother has been blessed with many children through the daughter of his late younger brother. The language of the verse implies that he did not know about any of these children until the day he received this news. If they had had these children in their young manhood, it would be impossible for Abraham not to have known about them until now. Aram-naharaim and Canaan are just not that far apart. And of course Abraham left the city of Haran when he was 75 years old, so Nahor was also an old man by that time—and his wife was no spring chicken. The Holy One did a miracle for them and they were visited with children in their old age. That is what it means by saying, "Milcah *too*." Rabbinic tradition states explicitly that Milcah was given children in the same way as her sister.

21 Kemuel the father of Aram. Aram was the more well known of the two; or perhaps there was another Kemuel in that generation, so this one had to be identified as the father of Aram.

23 Bethuel being the father of Rebekah. The text does not mention Laban (though he was older than Rebekah) because the text is only listing the eight children whom Milcah bore. But Rebekah is also mentioned because the reason this text is here is to tell us her genealogical relationship to Abraham.

24 And his concubine, whose name was Reumah. The text is giving us all the news that Abraham was given about his brother's children, perhaps because all of them were worthy of marrying Abraham's offspring: "You shall go to my father's house, to my kindred, and get a wife for my son" (24:38).

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **20 Some time later.** Both the events of this chapter happened "some time after" (compare OJPS) Isaac was born and Ishmael was expelled (Abarbanel). **Milcah too has borne children.** That is, "as you know, Milcah too has borne children."

23 Bethuel being the father of Rebekah. This should be in quotation marks; it is part of the message. "You can find a wife for your son here. You do not need to stick to Canaan" (Sforno).

24 And his concubine, whose name was Reumah, also bore children. If he doesn't like Rebekah, he still will not need to get involved with the descendants of Canaan (Sforno).

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ḤAYYEI SARAH

חיי שרה

NJPS 23 Sarah's lifetime—the span of Sarah's life—came to one hundred and twenty-seven years. [2]Sarah died in Kiriath-arba—now Hebron—in the land of Canaan; and Abraham proceeded to mourn

OJPS 23 And the life of Sarah was a hundred and seven and twenty years; these were the years of the life of Sarah. [2]And Sarah died in Kiriath-arba—the same is Hebron—in the land of Canaan; and Abraham came to mourn for Sarah, and to weep

כג וַיִּהְיוּ חַיֵּי שָׂרָה מֵאָה שָׁנָה
וְעֶשְׂרִים שָׁנָה וְשֶׁבַע שָׁנִים שְׁנֵי חַיֵּי שָׂרָה׃
[2] וַתָּמָת שָׂרָה בְּקִרְיַת אַרְבַּע הִוא חֶבְרוֹן
בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן וַיָּבֹא אַבְרָהָם לִסְפֹּד לְשָׂרָה

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ The first question is the one Rashi answers: Why is the word "years" repeated three times when Sarah's age is given in v. 1? (But his answer is midrashic.) ✦ Since Abraham is living in Beer-sheba (see 22:19), how is it that Sarah died in Hebron (v. 2)? ✦ Shouldn't Isaac also have come "to mourn for Sarah"?

RASHI 23:1 Sarah's lifetime—the span of Sarah's life—came to one hundred and twenty-seven years. The Hebrew literally says, "a hundred years and twenty years and seven years." It was written that way so each of the number's three parts could be interpreted separately: At 100, Sarah was as free of sin as a 20-year-old (for a 20-year-old is not subject to punishment for sin); and at 20 she was as beautiful as a 7-year-old. Such were "the years of the life of Sarah" (this phrase ends the verse; see OJPS)—all of them equally good.

2 In Kiriath-arba. "The Town of Four," named after the four Anakites who lived there: Ahiman, Sheshai, Talmai, and their father. Another reading: it was named after the four couples who were buried there—Adam and Eve, Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and

KIMHI 23:1 Sarah's lifetime—the span of Sarah's life—came to one hundred and twenty-seven years. As with Abraham and Ishmael, in Hebrew the number repeats the word "years" three times. This is said to be a stylistic feature of the holy tongue. In all three cases, there is another expression identifying these years as the years of the person's life—here, "these were the years of the life of Sarah" (OJPS)—perhaps to let us know that they lived precisely that number of years, to the day, something that (according to our Sages) God grants to the righteous.

2 Sarah died in Kiriath-arba. Which is where they had been since leaving Beer-sheba. **Now Hebron.** The name of the city was always Hebron, but it belonged to the family of Arba ("four"), who was named after the four Anakites, himself and his three sons. **Abraham proceeded.** Literally, "Abraham came" in from outside, not having been

NAHMANIDES 23:1 Sarah's lifetime—the span of Sarah's life—came to one hundred and twenty-seven years. Rashi's midrashic explanation is not correct. Abraham's age at death is given exactly the same way, and so is Ishmael's. Were all of Ishmael's years equally good? He was wicked at first and eventually repented. Moreover, the point of listing each number as a separate amount of years cannot be to say that they were all the same, but to differentiate them. The explanation—including the explanation for why the Hebrew says "one hundred *year*" and "twenty *year*" (both in the singular) and then "seven *years*" (in the plural)—must be a linguistic one. In any case, this is not the source of the midrash in Genesis Rabbah; that was based on the superfluous addition at the end of the verse (see OJPS) of the words "the span of Sarah's life." As you see, there is no such midrash on 25:7, since that verse does not have such a repetition.

2 Abraham proceeded. Rashi's comment does not mean that we should interpret 22:19 to say that Abraham was *living* in Beer-sheba. If he were, why would Sarah be in Hebron? The meaning is that he took a trip there for some purpose and, while there, heard that Sarah had died and returned to mourn for her. The Sages say that he came from Mount Moriah, implying the midrash that Rashi gives in his next comment. It appears to me that Abraham received the command about the Binding in Beer-sheba, where he was living (see 21:33) and to which he returned; 21:34 tells us that Abraham "resided" in the land of the Philistines, which is where Beer-sheba was, for

RASHBAM 23:1 Sarah's lifetime. Though the lengths of other women's lives are not given, Sarah's had to be, since it was necessary to mention her death in connection with the acquisition of the cave. So her age at death is also mentioned, given that we have already been told that she was 90 when she gave birth.

2 In Kiriath-arba. That is, Arba Town, named after "[Arba] the father of Anak" (Josh. 15:13). It is a name of the same kind as "Sihon City" (Num. 21:28). **Abraham proceeded.** The Hebrew says literally

IBN EZRA 23:1 Sarah's life. Note that "life" is a plural word in Hebrew; it never occurs in the singular. **One hundred and twenty-seven years.** It is natural to put the largest units of the number first, though we find the opposite in some cases: "The span of Jacob's life came to seven years and forty and one hundred years" (47:28).

2 Arba. The name of one of the great men among the Anakites. Saying that "he" of "the name of Hebron was formerly Kiriath-arba: *he* was the great man among the Anakites" (Josh. 14:15) refers to Abraham is a midrash; Abraham was not an Anakite. **Abraham proceeded to mourn for Sarah.** Rather, "Abraham *came* to mourn for Sarah"

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS 23:1 Sarah's lifetime. More literally, "the years of Sarah were" (compare OJPS). But for those who like *gematria*, the numerical value of "were" (וידיו) gives the number of Sarah's years: 37, Isaac's age at the time of the Binding, when she died. One who has no children, as Sarah did not till age 90, is considered dead (Hizkuni). **The span of Sarah's life.** Some say this means she lived her full span of years, which according to the Sages Abraham did not. He should have lived 180 years as did Isaac, but died at 175 so he would not see Esau turn to the bad (Abarbanel). **One hundred and twenty-seven years.** She was as beautiful at 20 as a 7-year-old because, like a 7-year-old, she was beautiful without using makeup, which most 20-year-olds do use. But note that Rashi's comment is actually the reverse of the midrash, which says that she was as beautiful at 100 as at 20, and as sinless at 20 as at 7 (Hizkuni). It seems to me that her age is divided into three parts because she was physically youthful until age 100, when she gave birth; spent the next 20 years older but active; and then spent 7 years in extreme old age. These are the stages of life described by Avicenna. But all three stages were good and could thus be called her "life"—for years of grief and pain cannot be called living (Abarbanel).

2 Sarah died. It is not usual for the biblical text to mention a woman's death unless there is a particular incident involved, as with Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, in 35:8, explaining the name Allon-bacuth; with Rachel, in 35:18, explaining why she is not buried in the cave of Machpelah; and with Miriam, in Num. 20:1, because of the disappearance of the well. With Sarah, of course, it is the purchase of the cave, one of the 10 trials of Abraham (Bekhor Shor). **In Kiriath-arba.** Where Abraham had sent her, either to keep her from finding out about the Binding or, when she fell ill, because the air was more salubrious there. The "four" of *arba* refers to the four masters of the city,

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NJPS for Sarah and to bewail her. [3]Then Abraham rose from beside his dead, and spoke to the Hittites, saying, [4]"I am a resident alien among you; sell me a burial site among you, that I may remove my dead

OJPS for her. [3]And Abraham rose up from before his dead, and spoke unto the children of Heth, saying: [4]"I am a stranger and a sojourner with you: give me a possession of a burying-place with you, that

וְלִבְכֹּתָהּ׃ 3 וַיָּקָם אַבְרָהָם מֵעַל פְּנֵי מֵתוֹ
וַיְדַבֵּר אֶל־בְּנֵי־חֵת לֵאמֹר׃ 4 גֵּר־וְתוֹשָׁב
אָנֹכִי עִמָּכֶם תְּנוּ לִי אֲחֻזַּת־קֶבֶר עִמָּכֶם

v. 2. כ׳ זעירא לפי נוסחים מקובלים

RASHI Rebekah, Jacob and Leah. **Abraham proceeded.** Literally, he "came"—from Beer-sheba. **To mourn for Sarah and to bewail her.** Her death follows the story of the Binding of Isaac because it was the news that he had been an instant away from being slaughtered that caused her soul to fly away from her, and she died.

4 I am a resident alien among you. Someone from another country who has settled among you. A midrash: if you are willing to sell the burial site to me, fine—I am an alien and will pay for it; if not, I will claim my right as a resident and will just take it, seeing that the Holy One told me, "I will

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ If Abraham was interested in buying the cave of Machpelah, why didn't he speak to Ephron directly? Why rope the Hittites (v. 3) into the deal? ✦ Why did Abraham need a special "burial site" (v. 4) for his wife? Once a person is dead, what does he care where he is buried, or whether he is buried at all? He will "return to dust" (Eccles. 3:20) no matter what.

RASHBAM "Abraham came," but this is the correct expression even if he did not come from another place; one "comes to mourn" for someone.

4 I am a resident alien among you. I came to live as "a stranger" (OJPS). That is why, even though I have now settled down to reside among you, I do not have an ancestral burial plot here. **Sell me a burial site.** Literally, "give me" (OJPS), that is, as the Hebrew idiom has it, "permit me" to buy some land, and agree to let me inter on that land those in my family who die. — For a

KIMHI in the house at the time of her death, or perhaps he came from elsewhere, having been out of town when she died. **To mourn.** With eulogies and lamentation.

3 Then Abraham rose from beside his dead. To take care of the needs of the dead. **And spoke to the Hittites.** The men of the city, who were "the children of Heth" (OJPS), the son of Canaan. **[A]** Abraham gathered them together to speak to them.

4 I am a resident alien among you. I have resided among you for a long time, and I intend to stay here. **Sell me a burial site among you.** I want you to sell me a place in your land that will belong to me and to my children after me. But for now all I am requesting is a burial site. **That I may remove my dead for burial. [B]**

[A] See 10:15. **[B]** "Remove" is not in the Hebrew, but follows Kimhi's comment.

IBN EZRA (OJPS)—he came from somewhere else. **And to bewail her.** Literally, "to weep her" (compare OJPS). You will find the same idiom in the Hebrew of "She shall spend a month's time in your house *lamenting* her father and mother" (Deut. 21:13).

3 His dead. Using the masculine form of the word, referring to the body. **Saying.** See my comment to "saying" of Exod. 19:3.

4 I am a resident alien. "Alien" by itself can refer to someone who is temporarily staying in a particular location. A "resident" alien is one who lives there more or less permanently. He is saying, "We must all die. But I have no **site**"—no property—"on which I can bury my dead." Or perhaps "no site" here means "no holding"—no land that I can get hold of for money.

NAHMANIDES quite some while. That is why it took him three days to get to Jerusalem. Hebron is much closer to Jerusalem, being "in the hill country of Judah" (Josh. 20:7). All this means that Sarah did not die during the years after the Binding, when they still lived in Beer-sheba. Sarah would not have been living in Hebron while Abraham was living in Beer-sheba. The episodes with Abimelech in chs. 20 and 21 suggest that Isaac himself was born in Beer-sheba. Remember, too, that when Hagar was expelled she was "in the wilderness of Beer-sheba" (21:14). But eventually they moved to Hebron, where that righteous woman Sarah died. The midrash that her death was a direct result of the Binding would therefore require that they be living in Hebron at the time it was commanded; that Abraham did not spend three days getting to Jerusalem but wandered around the vicinity until it pleased the Holy One to show him the mountain; that he did not go home afterward but went to his tamarisk in Beer-sheba to give thanks for the miracle that had occurred to him; and that while there he heard about Sarah's death and came back to Hebron. So the statements that Abraham came from Mount Moriah and that he came from Beer-sheba are really one and the same. In either case, 22:19 would have to mean that "Abraham stayed in Beer-sheba" after returning there from burying Sarah. Presumably Isaac being "settled in the region of the Negeb" (24:62) means that he was living in Beer-sheba when he married Rebekah. In any case, all the commentators agree that he "came" (OJPS) from somewhere else. In my view, Sarah had her own tent, as was women's custom at the time, and that must be where she died and where Abraham came to mourn for her. But it might indeed mean, as NJPS translates, that Abraham "proceeded to mourn" for her. The verb "come" is used throughout rabbinic literature to imply incipient action. I do not see how he could possibly have come to Hebron from somewhere else without the text telling us explicitly, "Abraham heard that Sarah had died and came from [whatever place] to mourn for her."

4 I am a resident alien among you. The custom was that each family had its own burial site, and that there was a separate cemetery for all those who came from elsewhere. So Abraham explains to the Hittites, "I come from a foreign country and did not inherit a

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS in chronological order: the tribe of Judah, Caleb, the priests, and the Levites (Hizkuni). He had sent her there to find them a house and enough land to keep the sheep. He wanted to live in Canaan, not in Philistia. He also sent her to buy the cave, because he had a tradition that Adam and Eve were buried there; if he himself went to buy it, the price would be higher. But she died when she got to Hebron. As for Kiriath-arba, she died when the "little city" (Eccles. 9:14) constituted of the four (*arba*) elements came apart (Abarbanel). She died after Abraham was informed that Rebekah, who was worthy of taking her place, was born. The Sages say that no righteous person leaves the world before a correspondingly righteous person is born, citing Eccles. 1:5, "The sun rises, and the sun sets" (Sforno). **Abraham proceeded.** He "came" (OJPS) by himself because Isaac (who would not leave her) was with her when she died (Abarbanel). **To bewail her.** The כ of the Hebrew verb is written smaller than the other letters (Masorah).

3 Abraham rose from beside his dead. He had been lying next to her, eye to eye and mouth to mouth, screaming and crying. The death of a man's first wife is very difficult for him (Abarbanel). **And spoke to the Hittites.** Who had gathered to accompany him to the funeral (Abarbanel). The rules of mourning had not yet taken effect on him, since she was not yet buried (Sforno).

4 Sell me a burial site. If I simply bury her in someone's field, sooner or later the owner will plow up the grave and scatter the bones (Hizkuni).

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NJPS for burial." 5And the Hittites replied to Abraham, saying to him, 6"Hear us, my LORD: you are the elect of God among us. Bury your dead in the choicest of our burial places; none of us will withhold his burial place from you for burying your dead." 7Thereupon Abraham bowed low to the people of the land, the Hittites, 8and he said to them, "If it is your wish that I remove my dead for burial, you must agree to intercede for me with Ephron son of Zohar. 9Let him sell me the cave of Machpelah that he

OJPS I may bury my dead out of my sight." 5And the children of Heth answered Abraham, saying unto him: 6"Hear us, my lord: thou art a mighty prince among us; in the choice of our sepulchers bury thy dead; none of us shall withhold from thee his sepulcher, but that thou mayest bury thy dead." 7And Abraham rose up, and bowed down to the people of the land, even to the children of Heth. 8And he spoke with them, saying: "If it be your mind that I should bury my dead out of my sight, hear me, and entreat for me to Ephron the son of Zohar, 9that he may give me the cave of Machpelah,

וְאֶקְבְּרָה מֵתִי מִלְּפָנָי׃ 5 וַיַּעֲנוּ בְנֵי־חֵת
אֶת־אַבְרָהָם לֵאמֹר לוֹ׃ 6 שְׁמָעֵנוּ | אֲדֹנִי
נְשִׂיא אֱלֹהִים אַתָּה בְּתוֹכֵנוּ בְּמִבְחַר
קְבָרֵינוּ קְבֹר אֶת־מֵתֶךָ אִישׁ מִמֶּנּוּ אֶת־
קִבְרוֹ לְא־יִכְלֶה מִמְּךָ מִקְּבֹר מֵתֶךָ׃ 7 וַיָּקָם
אַבְרָהָם וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ לְעַם־הָאָרֶץ לִבְנֵי־חֵת׃
8 וַיְדַבֵּר אִתָּם לֵאמֹר אִם־יֵשׁ אֶת־נַפְשְׁכֶם
לִקְבֹּר אֶת־מֵתִי מִלְּפָנַי שִׁמְעוּנִי וּפִגְעוּ־לִי
בְּעֶפְרֹן בֶּן־צֹחַר׃ 9 וְיִתֶּן־לִי אֶת־מְעָרַת
הַמַּכְפֵּלָה אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ אֲשֶׁר בִּקְצֵה שָׂדֵהוּ

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why of all places in the land of Canaan was Abraham determined to buy "the cave of Machpelah" (v. 9)?

RASHI assign this land to your heirs" (12:7). **A burial site.** A piece of land for a cemetery.

6 None of us will withhold his burial place from you. The verb is כלא, here used with the same meaning as כלא: "the rain from the sky was *held back*" (8:2) and "You will not *withhold* from me Your compassion" (Ps. 40:12).

8 To intercede. Rather, "to request." Compare "Do not *urge* me to leave you" (Ruth 1:16).

9 Machpelah. "Double"—a building with an upper floor on top of it. Another reading:

RASHBAM plot cannot be used for burial unless the residents of the town are willing. As we see from vv. 18–20, all "the Hittites" had to concur. **I may remove my dead for burial.** Literally, "that I may bury my dead from before me." But NJPS understands the idiom correctly.

6 You are the elect of God among us. And not "a resident alien" (v. 4). You do not need to buy anything. **Bury your dead in the choicest of our burial places.** Where the rulers of the land are buried. You have a grave waiting for you there.

9 The cave of Machpelah. That whole valley was called Machpelah, just as the

KIMHI **5 And the Hittites replied.** They agreed among themselves to give him this reply.

6 You are the elect of God among us. God has chosen you, and among ourselves we acknowledge this about you. **Bury your dead in the choicest of our burial places.** They had many burial caves there; each family had a separate cave, where they would bury multiple corpses, each in its own coffin. Each such cave was called a *kever*—not a grave, as the word sometimes means, but a "burial place." This is still the custom in many locations. **None of us will withhold his burial place from you.** They thought he was asking one of them to give him a spot in his family's burial cave, but that was not what he was asking; he wanted a separate burial cave for himself and his family, not a spot in someone else's cave.

7 Thereupon Abraham bowed low. Rather, he "rose up, and bowed down" (OJPS), first getting to his feet and then bowing his head in acknowledgment of the favor they had offered to do for him—then he let them know what he was really asking for.

8 Intercede for me with Ephron. Plead with him on my behalf.

9 Let him sell me the cave of Machpelah. Note that he is asking only for the cave,

IBN EZRA **6 My lord.** Since it is not "our lord," these must be the words of a spokesman. It would not be proper to include the others in such an expression. **The elect of God.** Rather, "a mighty prince" (OJPS)—using *elohim* as a superlative—because you are a prophet. **[A] Withhold.** The Hebrew root sometimes has a final ה and sometimes a final א.

7 Abraham bowed low. For the grammar of this unusual verb, see my *Basic Hebrew Grammar*. **[B]** Those who say that Abraham was "bowing low" here to the Holy One are talking nonsense. The verse says quite clearly that he was bowing to **the Hittites.** It simply means that he bowed his head to them, as one does in acknowledging a kindness. Moses too "bowed low" to his father-in-law (Exod. 18:7).

9 The cave of Machpelah. That is, the Double Cave—a cave with another cave

[A] But Ibn Ezra may be hinting here at the likeness between *nasi* ("elect") and *navi* ("prophet"). **[B]** *Sefer ha-Yesod.*

NAHMANIDES family tomb here. But I live here now and I intend to stay." **Sell me a burial site among you.** The Hebrew does not literally say "sell me" but uses the idiom "give me" (OJPS), which they took literally, to mean that he wanted it as a gift.

6 You are the elect of God among us. He has made you king over us. We and our land are at your service. Take whichever burial site you want, and it will be yours permanently.

8 If it is your wish that I remove my dead for burial. I do not want to bury her in someone else's tomb. So you must help me buy a burial site. Otherwise I will have to bury the body in a coffin. **[A] Intercede for me with Ephron son of Zohar.** He was rich (as we see from v. 15, 400 shekels meant nothing to him) and highly respected, which meant that he would not want to sell his ancestral land. That is why Abraham could not simply offer him a high price, but needed the Hittites to intercede for him.

9 Let him sell me the cave. Which was at the edge of his property, and which was not already being used as a burial site. Again, the Hebrew verb is really "give" (OJPS); since this was an ancestral possession, Abraham would consider even a sale at full price to be a gift

[A] Presumably in the potter's field used for strangers.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **6 You are the elect of God among us.** And not an "alien" (Bekhor Shor). So you need not bury your dead in a field that someone will plow. You can bury her where we bury our own leaders. It would be an honor for us (Hizkuni).

7 Abraham bowed low. More precisely, he "rose up, and bowed down" (OJPS), needing to rise because he wanted to bow not only to those in front of him but also to those in back of him and on the side (Bekhor Shor). He did not need to rise in v. 12, where he bowed only to Ephron (Hizkuni).

8 Intercede for me with Ephron son of Zohar. The offer in v. 6 did not apply to him, since he was not a Hittite (Hizkuni). Abraham had to be a bit sneaky about this; if Ephron had known that Adam and Eve were buried in the cave, he would not have sold it for love or money. And if Abraham had asked him directly, he would have known that something was up (Abarbanel).

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NJPS owns, which is at the edge of his land. Let him sell it to me, at the full price, for a burial site in your midst."

[10]Ephron was present among the Hittites; so Ephron the Hittite answered Abraham in the hearing of the Hittites, all who entered the gate of his town, saying, [11]"No, my LORD, hear me: I give you the field and I give you the cave that is in it; I give it to you in the presence of my people. Bury your dead." [12]Then Abraham bowed low

בְּכֶסֶף מָלֵא יִתְּנֶנָּה לִי בְּתוֹכְכֶם לַאֲחֻזַּת־
קָבֶר׃
10 וְעֶפְרֹן יֹשֵׁב בְּתוֹךְ בְּנֵי־חֵת וַיַּעַן עֶפְרֹן
הַחִתִּי אֶת־אַבְרָהָם בְּאָזְנֵי בְנֵי־חֵת לְכֹל
בָּאֵי שַׁעַר־עִירוֹ לֵאמֹר׃ 11 לֹא־אֲדֹנִי
שְׁמָעֵנִי הַשָּׂדֶה נָתַתִּי לָּךְ וְהַמְּעָרָה אֲשֶׁר־
בּוֹ לְךָ נְתַתִּיהָ לְעֵינֵי בְנֵי־עַמִּי נְתַתִּיהָ לָּךְ
קְבֹר מֵתֶךָ׃ 12 וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ אַבְרָהָם לִפְנֵי עַם

RASHI it was "doubled" in the sense of the couples who were buried there. **At the full price.** At its full value, just as David bought the site of the future Temple: "Sell it to me at the full price" (1 Chron. 21:22).

10 Ephron was present. Literally, he "was sitting" (OJPS), but the Hebrew word is spelled in such a way that it could also mean "he had taken his seat." Just that day he had been given an official position over them. He rose to greatness because Abraham, who was so important, had need of him. **All who entered the gate of his town.** All of them had left work to pay their last respects to Sarah.

11 No, my lord. No, you shall not pay money for it. **I give you the field.** Literally, "I have given it to you." Let it be as if I had already given it to you.

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why didn't Abraham say at once that he was willing to pay "the full price"? The deal could have been made much more easily. ✦ Since "Ephron was present" (v. 10), why must we be told that he answered Abraham "in the hearing of the Hittites"? That is obvious. ✦ Why are the Hittites redundantly described as "all who entered the gate of his town"? ✦ If Abraham asked only for the cave, why did Ephron announce, "I give you the field and I give you the cave that is in it" (v. 11)?

KIMHI not for the field. "Machpelah" is a name, not an adjective, as the grammar of the phrase shows. The Sages dispute whether it was a cave inside another cave or a cave on top of another cave. But we might say that the whole field was called Machpelah after the double cave that was in it. **At the full price.** More precisely, "for full silver," silver coins of full weight.

10 Ephron the Hittite answered Abraham in the hearing of the Hittites. In a loud voice so that all could hear. Notice that our verse invokes the "hearing" of the Hittites, while v. 18 speaks of the "sight" of the Hittites (or, as the translations have it, their "presence"), in the same order as in "The ear that heard me acclaimed me; the eye that saw, gave witness for me" (Job 29:11). **All who entered the gate of his town.** That is, all the men of the town. Sometimes, as here, the inhabitants of a town are described as "all who enter"; other times, as "all who go forth," **[C]** in both cases for brevity's sake. But in Jeremiah you will find both expressions together: "the People's Gate, by which the kings of Judah enter and by which they go forth" (Jer. 17:19).

12 That I may bury my dead there. Rather, "and let me bury me dead there." There is no need for delay.

[C] See 34:24.

OJPS which he hath, which is in the end of his field; for the full price let him give it to me in the midst of you for a possession of a burying-place."

[10]Now Ephron was sitting in the midst of the children of Heth; and Ephron the Hittite answered Abraham in the hearing of the children of Heth, even of all that went in at the gate of his city, saying: [11]"Nay, my lord, hear me: the field give I thee, and the cave that is therein, I give it thee; in the presence of the sons of my people give I it thee; bury thy dead." [12]And Abraham bowed down

RASHBAM whole area where Lot settled was called "the plain of the Jordan" (13:10–11). Our proof is the phrase "Ephron's land in Machpelah" (v. 17). **The full price.** The full amount that it is worth. **For a burial site.** So that you are all willing to let me bury my dead there. **In your midst.** In Hebrew, this phrase follows "Let him sell it to me" (compare OJPS). Let him sell it to me in your presence; you can serve as witnesses.

11 I give you the field. The translations are correct, though the Hebrew idiomatically uses a past-tense verb here. **And I give you the cave that is in it.** You are asking just for the cave, and offering to buy it; I will give you, as a gift, not just the cave but also the field it is in.

12 Abraham bowed low to Ephron **before the people of the land.**

IBN EZRA inside it. **At the full price.** "Full" being the opposite of "at a discount."

11 No. Not so. **Hear me.** *You* listen to *me*.

12 Then Abraham bowed low before the people of the land. This time Abraham is bowing *before* the people of the land, to Ephron, to acknowledge his act of kindness.

NAHMANIDES on Ephron's part. Or "give" may be the Biblical Hebrew idiom for "sell." **Machpelah.** Rashi's comment is not correct; v. 17 makes clear that Machpelah was just the name of the place, and there is no need to interpret place names. They do say in Genesis Rabbah that the Holy One folded Adam's body over, "doubling" him, **[B]** and that this gave the place its name. But the Hittites did not think the name meant anything; Ephron sold him the cave without any idea that anyone was already buried there.

11 I give you the field and I give you the cave that is in it. Whether out of politeness or deceptively, Ephron adds the "field" to the property that will be transferred. How could a great man like Abraham have a burial site on someone else's property? Abraham, of course, was overjoyed at this, and bought the whole property at the full price that Ephron asked for. **In the presence of my people.** They are all here, and they all know about this and can bear witness to it. There will be no denial that I am giving it to you, and no reneging. **Bury your dead.** From this point on. It is yours, and I will not go back on the deal. — But Abraham did not accept this; he did not bury Sarah (v. 19) until after the field and the cave had passed to him "as his possession" (v. 18).

[B] The primordial Adam is mystically understood as being of enormous size.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **10 Ephron was present among the Hittites.** Rather, he "was at home" among them and had everything he needed; the Hebrew idiom is the same that the Shunammite woman said to Gehazi in 2 Kings 4:13, "I live among my own people" (Hizkuni). In their presence, he would be embarrassed to go back on their promise that "none of us will withhold his burial place from you" (Abarbanel).

11 No, my lord. No, they do not need to intercede for you (Abarbanel). **Hear me.** *You* hear me, without any intermediary (Sforno). **I give you the field and I give you the cave that is in it.** I don't really want the field if you are going to bury bodies in the cave (Bekhor Shor). If I give you only the cave, you will have no way to get in and out of it (Hizkuni). "I gave it" (as the Hebrew really says) means that as soon as he heard Abraham asking about it he immediately decided to give it to him (Abarbanel).

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NJPS before the people of the land, [13]and spoke to Ephron in the hearing of the people of the land, saying, "If only you would hear me out! Let me pay the price of the land; accept it from me, that I may bury my dead there." [14]And Ephron replied to Abraham, saying to him, [15]"My LORD, do hear me! A piece of land worth four hundred shekels of silver—what is that between you and me? Go and bury your dead." [16]Abraham accepted Ephron's terms. Abraham paid out to Ephron the money that he had named in the hearing of the Hittites—four hundred shekels of silver at the going merchants' rate.

[17]So Ephron's land in Machpelah, near

OJPS before the people of the land. [13]And he spoke unto Ephron in the hearing of the people of the land, saying: "But if thou wilt, I pray thee, hear me: I will give the price of the field; take it of me, and I will bury my dead there." [14]And Ephron answered Abraham, saying unto him: [15]"My lord, hearken unto me: a piece of land worth four hundred shekels of silver, what is that betwixt me and thee? bury therefore thy dead." [16]And Abraham hearkened unto Ephron; and Abraham weighed to Ephron the silver, which he had named in the hearing of the children of Heth, four hundred shekels of silver, current money with the merchant.

[17]So the field of Ephron, which was in

יב הָאָרֶץ׃ יג וַיְדַבֵּר אֶל־עֶפְרֹן בְּאָזְנֵי עַם־
הָאָרֶץ לֵאמֹר אַךְ אִם־אַתָּה לוּ שְׁמָעֵנִי
נָתַתִּי כֶּסֶף הַשָּׂדֶה קַח מִמֶּנִּי וְאֶקְבְּרָה
אֶת־מֵתִי שָׁמָּה׃ יד וַיַּעַן עֶפְרֹן אֶת־
אַבְרָהָם לֵאמֹר לוֹ׃ טו אֲדֹנִי שְׁמָעֵנִי אֶרֶץ
אַרְבַּע מֵאֹת שֶׁקֶל־כֶּסֶף בֵּינִי וּבֵינְךָ מַה־
הִוא וְאֶת־מֵתְךָ קְבֹר׃ טז וַיִּשְׁמַע אַבְרָהָם
אֶל־עֶפְרוֹן וַיִּשְׁקֹל אַבְרָהָם לְעֶפְרֹן אֶת־
הַכֶּסֶף אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר בְּאָזְנֵי בְנֵי־חֵת אַרְבַּע
מֵאוֹת שֶׁקֶל כֶּסֶף עֹבֵר לַסֹּחֵר׃ שני
יז וַיָּקָם | שְׂדֵה עֶפְרוֹן אֲשֶׁר בַּמַּכְפֵּלָה אֲשֶׁר

RASHI **13 If only you would hear me out!** OJPS translates more literally; NJPS has the sense. "You asked *me* to hear *you* and to accept it for free, but I cannot do that." **Let me pay.** Literally, "I have given." I have the full price ready; if only I had already given it to you!

15 Between you and me. Between two friends like us, what difference does it make? None at all! So forget about the deal, just bury your dead.

16 Abraham paid out to Ephron. Ephron's name is spelled without a ו here, symbolizing his being lacking. He said much and did not do even a little, taking centenaria from Abraham—the largest coins. **At the going merchants' rate.** Rather, "accepted by merchants." These were shekels that would be accepted anywhere. For some locations had shekels of larger size than elsewhere.

KIMHI **15 What is that between you and me?** What difference does it make whether you give me the 400 shekels or not? You need not delay burying your dead on that account.

16 Silver at the going merchants' rate. Rather, "silver that passes between merchants," who are careful to check whether coins are of full weight.

17 Near Mamre. The field and the cave were near the town, which was called both Mamre and (as v. 19 tells us) Hebron.

NAHMANIDES **13 If only you would hear me out!** The Hebrew more literally says, "If only you . . . would that you would hear me out!" The point was to accentuate his request, as repetitions and other apparently extraneous words often do. But it is also possible to interpret Abraham as saying, "If you really [mean what you say] . . . and if you would hear me . . ." For comparable cases where the pronoun is emphasized to focus on the individuals, see the Hebrew of "If so, why do I exist?" (25:22) and of "How did you fare?" (Judg. 18:8). That seems to be how Onkelos understands our phrase.

15 A piece of land worth four hundred shekels of silver. The translations follow Onkelos in adding "worth" to the Hebrew phrase, which literally says, "a four-hundred-silver-shekel property." Perhaps there was a fixed price for land there based on the size of the property, as is common in most places. Our Sages, though, assume that Ephron was just picking a much higher price than he thought he could really get, and that Abraham, generous to a fault, simply gave it to him. But the straightforward sense of the text is that Ephron (or his ancestors) had paid 400 shekels for the land.

RASHBAM **15 A piece of land worth** no more than **four hundred shekels of silver—what is that between you and me?** You might as well take it from me for free, and **go and bury your dead** for free if you wish.

16 Abraham accepted Ephron's terms. Literally, Abraham "heard" Ephron—and "a word to the wise is sufficient." **Silver at the going merchants' rate.** Refined silver, accepted for any kind of merchandise. We find the phrase in 2 Kings 12:5, in the story of Jehoiada, where NJPS translates it "current money." But it is literally "money that passes," money that is good in any location. That is the real meaning of the comparable expression in Song 5:5—not "flowing myrrh" but myrrh of good enough quality to be acceptable anywhere.

IBN EZRA **13 If only you would hear me out!** Perhaps: "If only you would! Hear me out!" Or perhaps: "If you would [do so], please hear me out and let me pay the full price."

16 At the going merchants' rate. Rather, "current money" (OJPS). He would accept only the best coinage.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **13 Let me pay the price of the land; accept it from me.** Not "let me pay," but "I give" (compare OJPS). As the Hebrew punctuation makes clear, Abraham is *quoting* what Ephron said in v. 11. The correct translation is: "'I give [it to you]'?! No, the price of the land you must accept from me" (Hizkuni). One possible explanation for what Abraham is saying is this: "If you really don't mind getting rid of your ancestral holding—as appears from what you said—then at least let me pay you for it." Abraham thought Ephron might be just trying to get rid of him, assuming that he would not take a gift of this kind. But Abraham did not spell this out so as not to embarrass Ephron (Gersonides).

15 A piece of land worth four hundred shekels of silver—what is that between you and me? Go and bury your dead. It is such a small amount of money; you can pay me later (Abarbanel).

16 Abraham paid out to Ephron the money that he had named. Ephron's name is spelled deficiently (compare the previous occurrence in this verse) so that its numerical value can equal 400, the number of shekels Abraham paid him (Hizkuni). **At the going merchants' rate.** Rather, he paid it to Ephron "via the merchant" of the town (compare OJPS) so Ephron would not be embarrassed by having to take it and check the value of the silver (Abarbanel).

17 Ephron's land in Machpelah, near Mamre. Mamre built himself a town outside Hebron, which originally belonged to the Hittites. After he died, the Anakite named Arba took over both locations and called them Kiriath-arba. When the Israelites got rid of the Hittites, they called the whole place Hebron (Hizkuni).

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NJPS Mamre—the field with its cave and all the trees anywhere within the confines of that field—passed [18]to Abraham as his possession, in the presence of the Hittites, of all who entered the gate of his town. [19]And then Abraham buried his wife Sarah in the cave of the field of Machpelah, facing Mamre—now Hebron—in the land of Canaan. [20]Thus the field with its cave passed from the Hittites to Abraham, as a burial site.

OJPS Machpelah, which was before Mamre, the field, and the cave which was therein, and all the trees that were in the field, that were in all the border thereof round about, were made sure [18]unto Abraham for a possession in the presence of the children of Heth, before all that went in at the gate of his city. [19]And after this, Abraham buried Sarah his wife in the cave of the field of Machpelah before Mamre—the same is Hebron—in the land of Canaan. [20]And the field, and the cave that is therein, were made sure unto Abraham for a possession of a burying-place by the children of Heth.

לִפְנֵי מַמְרֵא הַשָּׂדֶה וְהַמְּעָרָה אֲשֶׁר־בּוֹ וְכָל־הָעֵץ אֲשֶׁר בַּשָּׂדֶה אֲשֶׁר בְּכָל־גְּבֻלוֹ סָבִיב׃ 18 לְאַבְרָהָם לְמִקְנָה לְעֵינֵי בְנֵי־חֵת בְּכֹל בָּאֵי שַׁעַר־עִירוֹ׃ 19 וְאַחֲרֵי־כֵן קָבַר אַבְרָהָם אֶת־שָׂרָה אִשְׁתּוֹ אֶל־מְעָרַת שְׂדֵה הַמַּכְפֵּלָה עַל־פְּנֵי מַמְרֵא הִוא חֶבְרוֹן בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן׃ 20 וַיָּקָם הַשָּׂדֶה וְהַמְּעָרָה אֲשֶׁר־בּוֹ לְאַבְרָהָם לַאֲחֻזַּת־קֶבֶר מֵאֵת בְּנֵי־חֵת׃ ס

כד

24 Abraham was now old, advanced in

24 And Abraham was old, well stricken

RASHI **17 Passed.** Rather, it "rose," passing from the possession of a commoner to that of a king. But the straightforward sense is of course that at this point it was legally transferred into Abraham's possession.

18 All who entered the gate of his town. Ephron sold it to Abraham among all who entered the gate in their official capacity.

24:1 The LORD had blessed Abraham in all things. "In all things"—one word in

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why must v. 20 repeat that "the field with its cave passed from the Hittites to Abraham"?

✦ How can v. 1 say that "Abraham was now old, advanced in years" in exactly the same language as in 18:11, though he was 99 years old in 18:11 and (given that Isaac married at 40) he is 140 years old now?

RASHBAM **18 To Abraham as his possession.** Rather, "as his purchase." The sale was complete as soon as the money was transferred.

20 Thus the field with its cave passed from the Hittites to Abraham. The field and cave did not become his "possession" until he had buried his wife Sarah there.

24:1 Advanced in years. It was time to marry off his son if he wanted to do so

KIMHI **18 In the presence of the Hittites.** In their presence, Abraham weighed out the silver to Ephron, who sold the property to Abraham and gave him a bill of sale in their presence.

20 Thus the field with its cave passed from the Hittites to Abraham, as a burial site. "From the Hittites" because Ephron sold it to Abraham with their full agreement. They were all glad for Abraham to have property among them.

24:1 Advanced in years. Advanced far into the years that are the culmination of

IBN EZRA **17–18 Passed to Abraham.** The transaction took place. These two verses are a single sentence, like vv. 3–4. That is not true, however, for any of the 10 such examples that Saadia gives.

18 In the presence of the Hittites. The local people. **All who entered the gate of his town.** All who happened to be passing by at the time.

19 And then Abraham buried his wife Sarah. From which time the property became a burial site for Abraham and his descendants. This episode is to inform us of the high rank of the land of Israel as a home both for the living and for the dead, and of course to confirm the Holy One's promise to Abraham of the land of Canaan "as an everlasting holding" (17:8).

24:1 The LORD had blessed Abraham in all things. With long life, wealth, honor,

NAHMANIDES **18 All who entered the gate of his town.** Besides the local Hittites, these were the merchants and travelers who happened to be passing through.

19 Mamre. The more well-known name at the time. **In the land of Canaan.** Since this whole episode has kept mentioning Ephron "the Hittite" and said "the Hittites" over and over again, it concludes by reminding us that this location was in fact in Canaan, that is, in the land of Israel. It began the same way (see v. 2). This righteous woman died in the land of Israel and was buried there. For the Hittites are one of the clans of the Canaanites. But I think the point is to emphasize that this was in Canaan and not in Philistia, where Abraham had resided for "a long time" (21:34). We have seen Abraham moving from Gerar to Beer-sheba and then to Hebron and then back again, but this cave is in Canaan. This episode shows us how kind the Holy One was to Abraham—a stranger and alone, yet called by the whole people "my lord" and "the elect of God" (v. 6). He had not claimed to be a great ruler of any kind. But now "I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you" (12:2) was fulfilled, and his wife was buried in the Lord's possession. We are further informed of the location in which the Patriarchs are interred so that we can pay our respects to the burial place of our holy ancestors. Rabbinic tradition says this episode was one of the 10 tests of Abraham—having to find and acquire a place to bury Sarah. I have no idea what Ibn Ezra means by saying this episode confirms the gift of the land and demonstrates "the high rank of the land of Israel as a home both for the living and for the dead." Was Abraham supposed to drag her to some other country to bury her? And the "promise" to Abraham was (1) about the entire land and (2) not fulfilled for him but for his offspring.

24:1 Abraham was now old, advanced in years. The text repeats what we knew from 18:11 in order to set the stage for Abraham's

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **19 Abraham buried his wife Sarah.** Burial is necessary because "the dust returns to the ground as it was and the soul returns to God who bestowed it" (Eccles. 12:7). The body must decay before the soul can return. And it is "no end of scorn and provocation" (Esther 1:18) for the image of God to lie on the ground, rotting and stinking (Abarbanel). **In the cave of the field of Machpelah.** A righteous person's body should not lie next to that of a wicked person, just as their spirits do not mingle in the afterlife. But because of the holiness of those who are buried there, this cave is as holy and pure as the cover of a Torah scroll (Abarbanel).

20 The field with its cave passed from the Hittites to Abraham, as a burial site. The sale itself is consummated in vv. 17–18, and Abraham now owned the cave and the field. But he still needed the Hittites' permission to use it as a burial site, which he obtains in this verse (Bekhor Shor).

24:1 Abraham was now old, advanced in years. For he too had been returned to his youth when Sarah was. Now he was old once

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NJPS years, and the LORD had blessed Abraham in all things. 2And Abraham said to the senior servant of his household, who had charge of all that he owned, "Put your

OJPS in age; and the LORD had blessed Abraham in all things. 2And Abraham said unto his servant, the elder of his house, that ruled over all that he had: "Put, I pray

בֵּרַךְ אֶת־אַבְרָהָם בַּכֹּל׃ 2 וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָהָם
אֶל־עַבְדּוֹ זְקַן בֵּיתוֹ הַמֹּשֵׁל בְּכָל־אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why tell us blandly that the Lord had blessed Abraham "in all things" and not specify, as the text does in other cases, that he was blessed with wealth, honor, and so forth? ✦ What does any of this have to do with finding Isaac a wife? That would be determined by Isaac's age and condition, not Abraham's.

RASHI Hebrew—has the same numerical value as the word meaning "a son." Having a son, Abraham needed to find him a wife.

2 Put your hand under my thigh. The one taking the oath must take hold of an object that involves a commandment—a Torah scroll or a set of phylacteries. But for Abraham, circumcision was the first commandment, one he had literally taken pains to observe, and it was very dear to him.

KIMHI man's days on earth. **The LORD had blessed Abraham in all things.** There was nothing in this world that he lacked or needed but to marry his son Isaac to a suitable wife.

2 The senior servant of his household. Either the most senior or one who had grown up in his house and now was "old" (compare OJPS). In either case the point is that he was faithful to Abraham, was in charge of all of Abraham's possessions, and deserved to be sent on this assignment.

NAHMANIDES request. Abraham realized that he was getting extremely old and might go to his eternal home before the servant had returned. That is why he made the servant—whose advice Isaac would follow because he "had charge of all that he owned" (v. 2)—swear not to get him a Canaanite wife. The explanation in Genesis Rabbah that our verse refers to a less vital stage of old age is based on the fact that 18:11 says they were "advancing" in years, while our verse says that Abraham was already "advanced" in years. **The LORD had blessed Abraham in all things.** He had wealth, property, honor, long life, and children—everything a man could want except for grandchildren to inherit his high status. R. Meir explains that it was a blessing for Abraham not to have a daughter. He would have had to marry her to one of the cursed Canaanites, or send her out of the land (which he did not want to do) back to his family, where in any case she would end up worshiping idols as they did. But the "others" in Genesis Rabbah who say that Abraham had a daughter named Bakol have in fact broached a profound topic that is one of the deepest mysteries of the Torah. The Holy One has an aspect that is called Kol ("All"), which is indeed the basis of everything: "It is I, the LORD, who made *all*" (Isa. 44:24). This is what "the greatest advantage in *all* the earth" (Eccles. 5:8) refers to. The great advantage that flows from the divine to all inhabitants of the earth is based on this All. It is the 8th of the 13 Attributes of God, **[C]** and a subsidiary attribute called Bat ("Daughter") derives from it. This is the attribute through which He supervises all there is; it is the heavenly court alluded to in the rabbinic saying that the Holy One is in all places. This daughter is the "bride" (*kallah*) of the Song of Songs, so named because she is included (*kelulah*) in the All (*kol*). The Sages often refer to her as the Assembly of Israel because she is the assemblage of All. This attribute was a kind of daughter to Abraham, since he followed this attribute in being kind and loyal. That is what the opinion of the "others" in Genesis Rabbah refers to. He was, after all, blessed both in heaven and on earth (see v. 3). You will find this topic discussed in many places in rabbinic literature, including the *Midrash of R. Nehunya b. ha-Kaneh*. **[D]** If you understand what I have written, you will understand what those cursed women meant by saying, "But ever since we stopped making offerings to the work of the heavens . . . we have lacked *all*" (Jer. 44:18), and why "work" is spelled there without an א so that it can be read as if it were "queen." You will be able to comprehend many other things that are concealed in the Torah and the rest of the Bible. If my learned friend who so prides himself on knowing the secrets of the Torah **[E]** only understood this, he would still the lips that make such fun of the words of our Sages. That is why I have written all this—to stop the mouths of those who speak so haughtily against the righteous.

[C] See Exod. 34:6–7 and the commentaries there. **[D]** *Sefer ha-Bahir*. We omit Nahmanides' extensive citation of rabbinic sources. **[E]** Ibn Ezra.

RASHBAM during his lifetime. **The LORD had blessed Abraham in all things.** He was therefore not sending his servants to get Isaac a wife from his own family for lack of women in Canaan who would want to marry him. The Lord had blessed him in all things, and everyone would want to marry Isaac. It was Abraham who insisted that he only marry someone from the family. The servant himself explains what our phrase means: "The LORD has greatly blessed my master, and he has become rich" (v. 35). The phrase in our verse prepares us for that statement. It is anticipatory, like "Ham being the father of Canaan" (9:18). **[A]**

2 Put your hand under my thigh. Compare Jacob saying to Joseph, "Place your hand under my thigh as a pledge of your steadfast loyalty" (47:29). This is how a son swore to his father and a servant to his master, since the servant's status is comparable to that of a son: "A son should honor his father, and a slave his master" (Mal. 1:6). A handshake deal applies when there

[A] See Rashbam's comment there.

IBN EZRA and children—everything a man could want. The midrash that He blessed Abraham with a daughter named Bakol is making the preposition "in" part of her name, so they would have to add another preposition to replace it.

2 Put your hand under my thigh. Someone says this has to do with Abraham's circumcision, but if that were so he would be swearing by the circumcision and not "by the LORD" (v. 3). To me, the most plausible explanation is that in those days there was a rule that a man should place his hand under the thigh of the man to whom he was subject, as if the master were saying, "If you are indeed subject to me, put your hand under my thigh." The master would be sitting down, with his thigh on top of the hand. The underling would thereby acknowledge,

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS again (Hizkuni). Old age has a beginning, a middle, and an end; the wide middle range is when one is "advancing" in years (Abarbanel). **The LORD had blessed Abraham in all things.** During his old age. For his younger years, in Ur, had been full of trouble (Abarbanel).

2 The senior servant of his household. Old enough so that he would not be suspect of sexual impropriety (Hizkuni). **Put your hand under my thigh.** This was their standard way of sealing an agreement, as shaking hands is ours. But the expression is metaphorical, as if to say, "Put your hand under my foot, to demonstrate that you are subordinate to me with regard to this oath." It is not that he would really put his hand there. The Christians claim he put his hand under Abraham's thigh because that is where that blankety-blank Jesus of theirs would come forth from, but that is easy to refute: he wasn't sired by a human male, was he? So according to them he

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NJPS hand under my thigh [3]and I will make you swear by the LORD, the God of heaven and the God of the earth, that you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites among whom I dwell, [4]but will go to the land of my birth and get a wife for my son Isaac." [5]And the servant said to him, "What if the woman does not consent to follow me to this land, shall I then take your son back to the land

שִׁים־נָא יָדְךָ תַּחַת יָרֵכִי׃ 3 וְאַשְׁבִּיעֲךָ
בַּיהוָה אֱלֹהֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם וֵאלֹהֵי הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר
לֹא־תִקַּח אִשָּׁה לִבְנִי מִבְּנוֹת הַכְּנַעֲנִי אֲשֶׁר
אָנֹכִי יוֹשֵׁב בְּקִרְבּוֹ׃ 4 כִּי אֶל־אַרְצִי וְאֶל־
מוֹלַדְתִּי תֵּלֵךְ וְלָקַחְתָּ אִשָּׁה לִבְנִי לְיִצְחָק׃
5 וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו הָעֶבֶד אוּלַי לֹא־תֹאבֶה
הָאִשָּׁה לָלֶכֶת אַחֲרַי אֶל־הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת
הֲהָשֵׁב אָשִׁיב אֶת־בִּנְךָ אֶל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר־

OJPS thee, thy hand under my thigh. [3]And I will make thee swear by the LORD, the God of heaven and the God of the earth, that thou shalt not take a wife for my son of the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell. [4]But thou shalt go unto my country, and to my kindred, and take a wife for my son, even for Isaac." [5]And the servant said unto him: "Peradventure the woman will not be willing to follow me unto this land; must I needs bring thy son back unto the land from whence thou

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why is it so important to Abraham to "not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites" (v. 3)? They are idolaters, but so are the people on the other side of the river. ✦ Why does he specify the Canaanites "among whom I dwell"? These particular Canaanites are good people, his allies. ✦ Why doesn't Abraham tell Isaac directly what Isaac told Jacob ("You shall not take a wife from among the Canaanite women," 28:6)? Instead, he says this to his servant Eliezer—as though Isaac is a child, not a 40-year-old man. ✦ Why does the servant say that the woman might not consent "to follow me" (v. 5)? Why not say that she might not consent to leave her home, or to come to Canaan?

KIMHI **3 The LORD, the God of heaven and the God of the earth.** He keeps an eye on the lower creatures as well, and He judges them. Do not imagine that if you violate this oath He will not punish your transgression; He is the God of the earth just as much as He is the God of heaven. — But when Abraham, who knew this on his own, speaks of himself in v. 7, he says merely "the LORD, the God of heaven." **From the daughters of the Canaanites.** For Canaan's offspring are cursed and Isaac is blessed. The blessed should not mix with the cursed.

4 The land of my birth. By saying "my kindred" (OJPS), Abraham was hinting to him that he meant Rebekah, about whose birth he had recently learned. **[D]**

5 What if the woman does not consent to follow me to this land, shall I then take your son back to the land from which you came? In case when I return I do not find you living.

[D] See 22:23.

RASHBAM is some other relationship between the two parties, as does cutting something in two and passing between the pieces. **[B]**

4 But will go to the land of my birth. Rather, to "my country, and to my kindred" (OJPS). Not just to the land of my birth, but to my relatives there.

5 Shall I then take your son back to the land from which you came? The land

[B] See 15:17–18.

IBN EZRA "My hand is under your authority, to do your will." In fact, this is still the rule in India.

3 The God of heaven and the God of the earth. Invoking the mystery of how it is decreed, in heaven, that on earth "the daughter of So-and-So is destined to marry So-and-So." **The Canaanites.** This is a catchall term referring to all 12 of the Canaanite nations. **[C]**

4 The land of my birth. More precisely, "my country and my homeland," referring to Haran (where he had lived) and Ur of the Chaldeans, respectively.

5 What if. The Hebrew word has many meanings. For this one, compare "if they do yield any" (Hosea 8:7). **Shall I then take your son back?** Note the unusual vowel

[C] See Ibn Ezra's comment to 15:21.

NAHMANIDES **3 I will make you swear by the LORD.** Abraham ought to have instructed Isaac directly not to marry a Canaanite woman, but his intent was to send home to his family for a wife while he was still alive. So he made the servant swear to do this no matter whether Abraham would live or die. He therefore had to give him all the instructions that follow. Having done so, there was no need to instruct Isaac, who would know what his father wanted and would certainly not violate his father's will or the oath he had made the servant swear. If, as is likely from the expression identifying the servant as the one "who had charge of all that he owned" (v. 2), this servant was the trustee of Abraham's property, then Isaac's inheritance would depend on his agreeing to this match. **The God of heaven and the God of the earth.** In Hebrew, "earth" and "land" are the same word. Indeed, the Holy One is the God of the "land" of Israel: "The nations which you deported and resettled in the towns of Samaria do not know the rules of the God of the land" (2 Kings 17:26); "They spoke of the God of Jerusalem as though He were like the gods of the other peoples of the land" (2 Chron. 32:19). There is a mystery involved in this about which I will write further, with the help of God. **[F]** Notice that in v. 7, where he is talking about what happened to him in Haran or in Ur, he does not say "the God of the land" but only "the God of heaven." As the Sages say, one who lives outside the land is like one who has no God. As David tells Saul, "They have driven me out today, so that I cannot have a share in the LORD's possession, but am told, 'Go and worship other gods'" (1 Sam. 26:19).

5 What if the woman does not consent to follow me? "The" woman whom I speak with of all the women who are there, or "the" woman who is the one that is suitable for Isaac.

[F] See his comment to Lev. 18:25.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS should have sworn by putting his hand on some woman's genitals (Bekhor Shor). The point was to remind the servant of the circumcision they had both undergone in order to make him "swear by the LORD" (v. 3). But he did not actually put his hand on his genitals—which would have been disgraceful—but nearby, under his thigh (Abarbanel). Abraham was afraid some rich man might bribe the servant to choose his daughter (Sforno).

3 The God of heaven and the God of the earth. Who can punish you in this world and in the next (Sforno). **That you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites among whom I dwell.** That is precisely what you would expect me to do, in order to inherit their land; but I don't need to do this. The Lord has given the land to me (Bekhor Shor). I don't want them to think I am trying to inherit their land. I don't want it *from* them at all—I want the Holy One to take it from them and give it to me (Hizkuni). The Canaanites typically behaved crudely, and we know from 9:25 that Canaan was cursed (Gersonides). If Isaac married a Canaanite woman, those who ultimately would inherit the land would also be Canaanites. Laban and Bethuel were idolaters, but this belief would not leave any impression on their descendants the way the Canaanites' actual behavior would (Abarbanel).

4 Go to the land of my birth. I don't want a foreign woman inheriting my property (Hizkuni). Abraham himself was too weak and too busy to make the trip (Abarbanel).

5 What if the woman does not consent to follow me? The servant did not ask, "What if the woman does not want to marry

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NJPS from which you came?" 6Abraham answered him, "On no account must you take my son back there! 7The LORD, the God of heaven, who took me from my father's house and from my native land, who promised me on oath, saying, 'I will assign this land to your offspring'—He will send His angel before you, and you will get a wife for my son from there. 8And if the woman does not consent to follow you, you shall then be clear of this oath to me;

OJPS camest?" 6And Abraham said unto him: "Beware thou that thou bring not my son back thither. 7The LORD, the God of heaven, who took me from my father's house, and from the land of my nativity, and who spoke unto me, and who swore unto me, saying: Unto thy seed will I give this land; He will send His angel before thee, and thou shalt take a wife for my son from thence. 8And if the woman be not willing to follow thee, then thou shalt be clear from this my oath; only thou shalt not

יָצָאתָ מִשָּׁם׃ 6 וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו אַבְרָהָם
הִשָּׁמֶר לְךָ פֶּן־תָּשִׁיב אֶת־בְּנִי שָׁמָּה׃
7 יְהוָה | אֱלֹהֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם אֲשֶׁר לָקָחַנִי מִבֵּית
אָבִי וּמֵאֶרֶץ מוֹלַדְתִּי וַאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר־לִי וַאֲשֶׁר
נִשְׁבַּע־לִי לֵאמֹר לְזַרְעֲךָ אֶתֵּן אֶת־הָאָרֶץ
הַזֹּאת הוּא יִשְׁלַח מַלְאָכוֹ לְפָנֶיךָ וְלָקַחְתָּ
אִשָּׁה לִבְנִי מִשָּׁם׃ 8 וְאִם־לֹא תֹאבֶה
הָאִשָּׁה לָלֶכֶת אַחֲרֶיךָ וְנִקֵּיתָ מִשְּׁבֻעָתִי

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why does Abraham say, "On no account must you take my son back there!" (v. 6). Could Eliezer have done so without Abraham's permission? Abraham was running the house, not Eliezer! ✦ How can vv. 5, 6, and 8 all speak of bringing Isaac "back" to a place where he had never been? ✦ Why does Abraham call the Lord "the God of heaven" in v. 7 when he had called Him "the God of heaven and the God of the earth" in v. 3? ✦ Why does Abraham introduce the promise that "I will assign this land to your offspring"? What does that have to do with Isaac's marriage? ✦ When Abraham says, "You shall then be clear of this oath to me" (v. 8), exactly what are the contents of the oath that the servant will be "clear of"?

RASHI **7 The LORD, the God of heaven, who took me from my father's house.** He does not add "the God of the earth" (v. 3), which he did say when asking him to swear. Abraham was telling him: The Lord is "the God of the earth" now, because I have made people familiar with Him. But when he "took me from my father's house," He was the God of heaven but not the God of the earth, for the inhabitants of earth did not know Him and His name was not familiar on earth. **From my father's house.** Haran. **From my native land.** Ur of the Chaldeans. **Who promised me.** Rather, "who spoke on my behalf" (see OJPS). One speaks "to" someone using the preposition *el*; when the preposition *l-* is used, as it is here, that refers to speaking "about" someone. It is the equivalent of *al*, as in "the promise that He made *concerning* me" (1 Kings 2:4). (The translation of Onkelos always makes this clear.) All that applies to "speaking," but when the verb is "say" rather than "speak," one can use *l-* to mean "say to." **On oath.** At the covenant between the "pieces" (15:17).

8 You shall then be clear of this oath to me. And you can get him a wife from among

KIMHI **7 Who promised me on oath.** Literally (see OJPS), "who spoke to me" before I left my native land "and who swore to me" at the Binding of Isaac. **He will send His angel before you.** To help you succeed in getting a wife for my son.

NAHMANIDES **7 From my native land.** If Rashi's comment is correct, then in v. 4 Abraham is sending the servant to Ur! God forbid, Heaven forfend, that the holy seed be mixed with that of the sinful Hamites. Even if you think Abraham meant that he had family in Ur who were of the seed of Shem, the servant went to Haran, as his master had told him. Since our phrase is literally "from the land of my home," perhaps Rashi thought that by "native land" Abraham means Ur, but that in v. 4 Abraham uses "my home" to mean "my family," and "my land" refers to the land in which he had lived? But this is all idle talk. He had lived much longer in Canaan than he did in Haran, so why would he call Haran "my land"? "To my land and to my home" (as v. 4 literally says) refers to one thing, as NJPS says and OJPS implies: my homeland, where my original ancestors were from. Genesis Rabbah takes "from my native land" as an extension of "from my father's house"; I was taken from my home and from my neighborhood. But v. 4 may in fact be a further specification, as OJPS takes it: "to my country" and not just there but actually "to my own family." It is not that he wanted a wife for Isaac from that country but specifically from his own family. **Who promised me.** The distinction Rashi makes is not correct; see the counterexamples in Exod. 32:34, Deut. 9:3, and Dan. 2:4. **And you will get a wife for my son from there.** "From my father's house," as the servant indeed tells them in v. 40, though he also says "from my kindred" there out of respect for them.

8 You shall then be clear of this oath to me. This means not that he would be allowed to get Isaac a Canaanite wife but only that he

RASHBAM of your ancestors. The son had never been there, but it is appropriate to call taking him there taking him "back" since Abraham had been there.

7 The LORD, the God of heaven, who took me from my father's house and from my native land. I know that the Lord who brought me here and gave this land to my offspring does not want my offspring to leave here. If He did, why would He have brought me here? So I know that **He will send His angel before you.** He will make your errand successful, in order to fulfill His promise to me.

IBN EZRA under the interrogative ה before the ה of the causative conjugation. If the usual vowel were used, it would cause pronunciation problems.

6 On no account must you. Literally, "be careful not to." The penultimate accent on the verb always indicates this meaning. When it is accented on the last syllable, as in Isa. 7:4, it means "keep calm," a meaning derived from the "lees" of wine (which comes from the same root), as in "He is settled on his *lees* and has not been poured from vessel to vessel" (Jer. 48:11).

7 He will send His angel. Rather, "may He send His angel." It is a prayer. If it were a prophecy, why would he say, "if the woman does not consent" (v. 8)?

8 Do not take my son back there. "Back" there in the sense that Abraham had been there. Let him stay in Israel.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS Isaac?"—what woman wouldn't? Rather, she might want Isaac to come and fetch her, and not consent "to follow me" due to her own self-respect (Abarbanel). Once I have taken her as Isaac's wife, I thereby obligate him for "her food, her clothing, and her conjugal rights" (Exod. 21:10). So if the woman does not consent to come here, he will have to go there (Sforno). **Shall I then take your son back to the land from which you came?** Taking him "back" in the sense that Eliezer himself would be returning there (Hizkuni). Similarly, Abraham's descendants "shall *return* here in the fourth generation" (15:16) despite never having actually been there (Gersonides).

7 The LORD, the God of heaven . . . He will send His angel before you. He does not add "the God of the earth" as he did in v. 3, since angels are not sent from the earth (Abarbanel). **You will get a wife for my son from there.** Not a prayer but a prophecy (Hizkuni).

8 If the woman does not consent to follow you. Then let him marry whomever he can find (Bekhor Shor). **You shall then be clear of this oath to me.** All I am making you swear is that you will go there and do your best (Bekhor Shor).

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NJPS but do not take my son back there." [9]So the servant put his hand under the thigh of his master Abraham and swore to him as bidden.

[10]Then the servant took ten of his master's camels and set out, taking with him all the bounty of his master; and he made his way to Aram-naharaim, to the city of Nahor. [11]He made the camels kneel down by the well outside the city, at evening time, the time when women come out to draw water. [12]And he said, "O LORD, God

OJPS bring my son back thither." [9]And the servant put his hand under the thigh of Abraham his master, and swore to him concerning this matter.

[10]And the servant took ten camels, of the camels of his master, and departed; having all goodly things of his master's in his hand; and he arose, and went to Aram-naharaim, unto the city of Nahor. [11]And he made the camels to kneel down without the city by the well of water at the time of evening, the time that women go out to draw water. [12]And he said: "O LORD, the

אַךְ אֶת־בְּנִי לֹא תָשֵׁב שָׁמָּה׃ 9 וַיָּשֶׂם
הָעֶבֶד אֶת־יָדָו תַּחַת יֶרֶךְ אַבְרָהָם אֲדֹנָיו
וַיִּשָּׁבַע לוֹ עַל־הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה׃ שלישי
10 וַיִּקַּח הָעֶבֶד עֲשָׂרָה גְמַלִּים מִגְּמַלֵּי
אֲדֹנָיו וַיֵּלֶךְ וְכָל־טוּב אֲדֹנָיו בְּיָדוֹ וַיָּקָם
וַיֵּלֶךְ אֶל־אֲרַם נַהֲרַיִם אֶל־עִיר נָחוֹר׃
11 וַיַּבְרֵךְ הַגְּמַלִּים מִחוּץ לָעִיר אֶל־בְּאֵר
הַמָּיִם לְעֵת עֶרֶב לְעֵת צֵאת הַשֹּׁאֲבֹת׃
12 וַיֹּאמַר | יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי אֲדֹנִי אַבְרָהָם

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why does the servant have to "put his hand under the thigh of his master" (v. 9) to take an oath? ✦ Eliezer's prayer, "O LORD, God of my master Abraham, grant me good fortune this day" (v. 12) is incoherent. How can he pray for God's providence and simultaneously ask for good "luck"? The Hebrew word actually means "coincidence," something that is incompatible with divine guidance.

RASHI the daughters of my local allies Aner, Eshkol, and Mamre. **But do not take my son back there**. "Only" (OJPS) implies a limitation. It is only my son Isaac whom you may not take back there. But my grandson Jacob will eventually return there.

10 Of his master's camels. They were distinguishable from the other camels because they were always muzzled to prevent them from grazing in other people's fields. **All the bounty of his master**. He had written a deed of gift transferring all he had to Isaac so they would jump at the opportunity to send him their daughter. **Aram-naharaim**. "Naharaim" means "of the two rivers" between which it is situated. This is Aram of Mesopotamia.

11 He made the camels kneel down. This is how camels lie down.

RASHBAM **9 As bidden**. Literally "concerning this matter" (OJPS), in the sense of agreeing to the conditions that Abraham had spelled out for him.

10 All the bounty of his master. Rather, "all the best" of his master—the most important men of Abraham's household. These were "the men [who were] with him" (v. 54).

11 He made the camels kneel down. Camels actually have two knees on each leg, one above the other, so one must make them "kneel" twice in order for them to drink because they are so tall. Thus the "joint that is clearly distinguishable in the camel" that our Sages mention on B. Ḥul. 76a.

KIMHI **10 All the bounty of his master**. A slight exaggeration, as in "all the world came to Joseph in Egypt to procure rations" (41:57) and many other such cases. He brought silver and gold and pearls to demonstrate Abraham's wealth and persuade his relatives to give Isaac a wife. **Aram-naharaim**. Aram of the Two Rivers (which passed through it). **To the city of Nahor**. That is, Ur, where Nahor had remained when Terah and Abraham left.

11 He made the camels kneel down. To rest them and water them. While doing this, he prayed.

IBN EZRA **11 He made the camels kneel down**. The translations are correct.

12 Grant me good fortune. The translations are interpretive. The text says merely, "make"—what I desire—"happen to me." Compare the same phrase in 27:20.

NAHMANIDES would no longer be responsible, and "the LORD will do what He deems right" (1 Chron. 19:13). If Aner, Eshkol, and Mamre were Canaanites, God forbid that Rashi's suggestion should be correct. And in fact they were Canaanites, since 14:13 calls Mamre an Amorite. In fact, Genesis Rabbah interprets "you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites among whom I dwell" to mean that he should not take a wife for him *even* from the daughters of Aner, Eshkol, and Mamre, who were the specific Canaanites "among whom" Abraham was dwelling. Once the servant was no longer responsible, Abraham was confident that Isaac would avoid them and marry someone from the families of Ishmael or Lot or from some other nation. But Abraham may be referring not to the Canaanite proviso but to "[that you] will go to the land of my birth and get a wife for my son Isaac" (v. 4). For that may also have been included in the oath. If so, "this" oath refers to his being clear only of that particular part of the oath. That would explain why the servant says that if they are not prepared to let Rebekah marry Isaac, then "I may turn right or left" (v. 49) rather than "I will turn back."

10 Then the servant took ten of his master's camels and set out, taking with him all the bounty of his master. If Rashi's comment and the comparable statement of Genesis Rabbah are correct, then "Abraham willed all that he owned to Isaac" (25:5) must refer to some sort of legal confirmation of the gift, to prevent a challenge to it after his death. If so, then NJPS is correct to say that the servant "took" his master's bounty as well (the verb occurs only once in the Hebrew of our verse). Others think our verse means, "Then the servant took ten of his master's camels . . . since all that his master had was in his hand," that is, he was in charge of it and could take what he liked. For he "had charge of all that he owned" (v. 2). But I think "all the bounty" is being used here as in "Hazael went to meet him, taking with him as a gift forty camel-loads of all the bounty of Damascus" (2 Kings 8:9), except that the servant took only 10 camel-loads of "all the bounty of his master." In both cases, they take a specific amount of "all the bounty." See also 45:23. The text is terse when it speaks of what is obvious.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **9 So the servant put his hand under the thigh of his master Abraham**. But Joseph, who is asked in 47:29 to do this, did not; as our Sages taught, "A man should not go to the bathhouse with his father" (Hizkuni).

10 Ten of his master's camels. To bring the 10 men who would be necessary if the blessings of betrothal were to be recited (Hizkuni).

11 At evening time, the time when women come out to draw water. As they also do just at dawn. But in the middle of the day, the sun shines on the water and heats it up; and it is much more burdensome to carry water when the sun is at its hottest (Abarbanel).

12 O LORD, God of my master Abraham, grant me good fortune this day. Literally, "make it 'happen' for me." Gersonides has made a huge mistake in his *Wars* by claiming that God's knowledge does not encompass the circumstantial "happenings" of everyday life, which he says do not have any organized cause. Scripture testifies over and over again that his view is false. It is only we who sometimes think such things merely happen. The servant certainly did not think so; he prayed to God for this to "happen" (Abarbanel).

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NJPS of my master Abraham, grant me good fortune this day, and deal graciously with my master Abraham: [13]Here I stand by the spring as the daughters of the townsmen come out to draw water; [14]let the maiden to whom I say, 'Please, lower your jar that I may drink,' and who replies, 'Drink, and I will also water your camels'—let her be the one whom You have decreed for Your servant Isaac. Thereby shall I know that You have dealt graciously with my master."

[15]He had scarcely finished speaking, when Rebekah, who was born to Bethuel, the son of Milcah the wife of Abraham's brother Nahor, came out with her jar on

OJPS God of my master Abraham, send me, I pray Thee, good speed this day, and show kindness unto my master Abraham. [13]Behold, I stand by the fountain of water; and the daughters of the men of the city come out to draw water. [14]So let it come to pass, that the damsel to whom I shall say: Let down thy pitcher, I pray thee, that I may drink; and she shall say: Drink, and I will give thy camels drink also; let the same be she that Thou hast appointed for Thy servant, even for Isaac; and thereby shall I know that Thou hast shown kindness unto my master."

[15]And it came to pass, before he had done speaking, that, behold, Rebekah came out, who was born to Bethuel the son of Milcah, the wife of Nahor, Abraham's brother, with her pitcher upon her

הַקְרֵה־נָ֣א לְפָנַ֔י הַיּ֖וֹם וַעֲשֵׂה־חֶ֣סֶד עִם־
אֲדֹנִ֑י אַבְרָהָ֖ם׃ 13 הִנֵּ֥ה אָנֹכִ֖י נִצָּ֥ב עַל־עֵ֛ין
הַמָּ֖יִם וּבְנ֣וֹת אַנְשֵׁ֑י הָעִ֖יר יֹצְא֥וֹת לִשְׁאֹ֖ב
מָֽיִם׃ 14 וְהָיָ֣ה הנער הַנַּעֲרָ֗ה אֲשֶׁ֨ר אֹמַ֤ר
אֵלֶ֙יהָ֙ הַטִּי־נָ֣א כַדֵּ֔ךְ וְאֶשְׁתֶּ֑ה וְאָמְרָ֣ה שְׁתֵ֔ה
וְגַ֥ם־גְּמַלֶּ֖יךָ אַשְׁקֶ֑ה אֹתָ֣הּ הֹכַ֔חְתָּ לְעַבְדְּךָ֖
לְיִצְחָ֑ק וּבָ֣הּ אֵדַ֔ע כִּֽי־עָשִׂ֥יתָ חֶ֖סֶד עִם־
אֲדֹנִֽי׃
15 וַיְהִי־הוּא֙ טֶ֣רֶם כִּלָּ֔ה לְדַבֵּ֖ר וְהִנֵּ֣ה רִבְקָ֗ה
יֹצֵ֤את אֲשֶׁר֙ יֻלְּדָ֣ה לִבְתוּאֵ֔ל בֶּן־מִלְכָּ֖ה
אֵ֣שֶׁת נָח֑וֹר אֲחִ֖י אַבְרָהָ֥ם וְכַדָּ֖הּ עַל־

RASHI **14 Let her be the one whom You have decreed.** Her kindness would make her worthy of him, and deserving to enter the household of Abraham. But the verb means not "decreed" but "appointed" (OJPS). More precisely, her selection was "clarified." **[A] Thereby shall I know.** Rather, "*let me* know thereby." It is a prayer, not a statement. **That You have dealt graciously with my master.** If she is of his family and appropriate for him, I will know that You have been gracious.

[A] See Rashi's comment to "whom the LORD has decreed" (v. 44).

KIMHI **14 Let her be the one.** He would obviously not give the test to a maiden who was lame or blind. But she still might turn out to be a servant girl or an illegitimate child or simply not from Abraham's family. That is why he was praying. **Thereby shall I know that You have dealt graciously with my master.** Thereby—if she turns out to be a good woman, from a good home, and of my master's family.

15 He had scarcely finished speaking. His prayer was answered immediately, "before he had done speaking" (OJPS)—while the words were still on his lips, or in his heart.

NAHMANIDES **14 Thereby shall I know that You have dealt graciously with my master.** It is a little difficult to make the Hebrew here correspond with Rashi's explanation. In fact, the translations are correct. "That is how I shall know that You have dealt graciously with my master—if she turns out to be from his family, intelligent, and beautiful." The way he says it in vv. 43–44 makes this clear.

15 Who was born to Bethuel, the son of Milcah the wife of Abraham's brother Nahor. Since Nahor also had children by "his concubine, whose name was Reumah" (22:24), Bethuel keeps being identified as Milcah's son. Milcah is mentioned before Nahor here because that is how the maiden introduces herself in v. 24. Putting the mother first would come naturally to a girl; notice that she runs to tell everything "to her mother's

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why does the servant have to say, "Here I stand by the spring" (v. 13)? We know this already from v. 11. ✦ What kind of test is it to ask for a maiden who will say, "Drink, and I will also water your camels" (v. 14)? The majority of maidens would do so. Nature gives water freely to us, just as it does the air. ✦ Why should such an insignificant action as watering the camels be the sign that this maiden was "the one whom You have decreed for Your servant Isaac" and that "You have dealt graciously with my master"? ✦ Why relate Rebekah to "Abraham's brother Nahor" (v. 15) in such a roundabout way and not call her simply "Rebekah, the daughter of Bethuel, the son of Nahor"? (See also v. 24.)

RASHBAM **14 Let her be the one whom You have decreed for Your servant Isaac.** Rather, "let the one You have decreed for Your servant Isaac be the one" who says that to me, not some other woman whom You have not decreed for him.

IBN EZRA **14 Let her be the one whom You have decreed.** He was certain that the prayer of his master the prophet had been answered, and that a bride had already been "appointed" (OJPS) for Isaac in a dream, via the angel of v. 7. **[D]** The idea for the sign was based on his belief that there was no family so generous as that of his master. Many find this request out of order, but I can't imagine why. If some other maiden were to do what he is proposing, he would most certainly ask her who she was (as he asked Rebekah, *before* giving her the gold in v. 22; see v. 47). If he found that she was from some other family, he would leave her alone, having lost nothing. The point is that he asked the Holy One to "decree" a maiden from his master's family, in such a way as to demonstrate her generous behavior—and the Holy One heeded his prayer. The sign Jonathan asks for is something completely different. **[E]**

[D] Most plausibly, he means that the chosen maiden would have had a dream prompting her to act as the servant had described. But see his comment to v. 51. **[E]** See 1 Samuel 14.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **13 Here I stand by the spring.** Rather than going into town. One who wants to marry should make sure of three things in a woman: that she is beautiful, that she is of good birth and that she gets along with people. I can see whether she is beautiful, and I can ask about her family, but she may not behave naturally (for one reason or another) if her parents are present. So I will stay here by the spring (Bekhor Shor). He knew that Hagar had been answered next to a well (21:19) and that Abraham had planted a tamarisk near one (21:33), so he decided to perform this test next to a well (Abarbanel).

14 Let her be the one whom You have decreed for Your servant Isaac. My master's house is always full of guests, and the woman Isaac marries must be pleasant and generous to them (Bekhor Shor). Standing next to the spring, it would have been easy for him to bend over and drink. He and his men must have had containers for water too; they certainly did not always wait for a maiden to show up and get water for them. But "let the maiden" whom I randomly pick not tell me to get the water myself; let her demonstrate that she is generous, hardworking, and intelligent enough to figure out that we might be of high rank, or have some illness or some other good reason not to fetch the water for ourselves (Abarbanel). Rather, "the one whom You have educated" in such a way that she is fit for your servant Isaac (Sforno). **Thereby shall I know that You have dealt graciously with my master.** And I shall know whether or not she is worthy of his son (Abarbanel).

15 He had scarcely finished speaking, when Rebekah . . . came out with her jar on her shoulder. But no other women came out; that would have complicated the test (Abarbanel).

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NJPS her shoulder. [16]The maiden was very beautiful, a virgin whom no man had known. She went down to the spring, filled her jar, and came up. [17]The servant ran toward her and said, "Please, let me sip a little water from your jar." [18]"Drink, my lord," she said, and she quickly lowered her jar upon her hand and let him drink. [19]When she had let him drink his fill, she said, "I will also draw for your camels, until they finish drinking." [20]Quickly emptying her jar into the trough, she ran back to the well to draw, and she drew for all his camels.

[21]The man, meanwhile, stood gazing at her, silently wondering whether the LORD

OJPS shoulder. [16]And the damsel was very fair to look upon, a virgin, neither had any man known her; and she went down to the fountain, and filled her pitcher, and came up. [17]And the servant ran to meet her, and said: "Give me to drink, I pray thee, a little water of thy pitcher." [18]And she said: "Drink, my lord"; and she hastened, and let down her pitcher upon her hand, and gave him drink. [19]And when she had done giving him drink, she said: "I will draw for thy camels also, until they have done drinking." [20]And she hastened, and emptied her pitcher into the trough, and ran again unto the well to draw, and drew for all his camels.

[21]And the man looked steadfastly on her; holding his peace, to know whether

שִׁכְמָהּ׃ 16 והנער וְהַנַּעֲרָה טֹבַת מַרְאֶה
מְאֹד בְּתוּלָה וְאִישׁ לֹא יְדָעָהּ וַתֵּרֶד
הָעַיְנָה וַתְּמַלֵּא כַדָּהּ וַתָּעַל׃ 17 וַיָּרָץ הָעֶבֶד
לִקְרָאתָהּ וַיֹּאמֶר הַגְמִיאִינִי נָא מְעַט־מַיִם
מִכַּדֵּךְ׃ 18 וַתֹּאמֶר שְׁתֵּה אֲדֹנִי וַתְּמַהֵר
וַתֹּרֶד כַּדָּהּ עַל־יָדָהּ וַתַּשְׁקֵהוּ׃ 19 וַתְּכַל
לְהַשְׁקֹתוֹ וַתֹּאמֶר גַּם לִגְמַלֶּיךָ אֶשְׁאָב עַד
אִם־כִּלּוּ לִשְׁתֹּת׃ 20 וַתְּמַהֵר וַתְּעַר כַּדָּהּ
אֶל־הַשֻּׁקְּת וַתָּרָץ עוֹד אֶל־הַבְּאֵר לִשְׁאֹב
וַתִּשְׁאַב לְכָל־גְּמַלָּיו׃
21 וְהָאִישׁ מִשְׁתָּאֵה לָהּ מַחֲרִישׁ לָדַעַת

RASHI **16 A virgin.** With regard to her maidenhead. **Whom no man had known.** Via anal intercourse. For the women of those days (outside of Abraham's family) would preserve their virginity technically but make themselves available in the other way. Our verse is testifying that Rebekah was innocent of either kind of behavior.

17 The servant ran toward her. He had seen the water rise up to her on its own.

18 She quickly lowered her jar. From her shoulder.

19 Until they finish drinking. Until they have "drunk their fill," as Onkelos puts it. That is what it means for a camel to "finish" drinking.

20 Emptying her jar. The verb is common with this meaning in Mishnaic Hebrew. In Biblical Hebrew it more often refers to being naked, but see the idiom of "emptying out" one's soul in Isa. 53:12 and Ps. 141:8. **The trough.** A stone trench where the camels drink.

21 Gazing at her. Metaphorically, he was "devastated": "Till towns *lie waste* without inhabitants" (Isa. 6:11). That is, he was dumbfounded, stunned at how close his mission was to success. But the Hebrew idiom (also used with other verbs of destruction) is not negative; it implies that one's mind is racing with thoughts. In this case, he did not know yet whether or not she was from Abraham's family. Again, he was wondering "about" her,

KIMHI **16 She went down to the spring, filled her jar, and came up.** The well is called a "spring" here because the water was so close to the surface of the earth. The midrash says that the water rose up to meet her, based on the wording that she "filled" her jar rather than "drawing" the water as one does from a well. But Hagar too "went and *filled* the skin with water" (21:19).

17 The servant ran toward her. Seeing that she was so beautiful. As for what he had requested, he trusted in God.

18 Drink, my lord. This demonstrated that she was a well-bred woman. She had no idea who he was but addressed him politely and hurried to offer him a drink, holding the jar with her own hand.

21 Silently wondering. He held his peace until the camels had finished drinking.

RASHBAM **16 Whom no man had known.** No man had been intimate with her even externally. For she was very chaste.

20 Emptying. Note that the root has a final ה, which is dropped in this form. It is the same verb as in "Kir *bared* the shield" (Isa. 22:6). **The trough.** This word is a segholate noun related to the verb in "Jacob . . . *watered* the flock" (29:10).

21 The man, meanwhile, stood gazing at her. Compare "the ground *lies waste*" (Isa. 6:11), with metathesis of the ת. He was shocked that this girl had said, "I will also draw for your camels" (v. 19). He understood from this that the Holy One had set up precisely what he had requested. The verb

IBN EZRA **16 Whom no man had known.** It is implausible that the text is referring by this phrase to anal intercourse. The point is that a woman can be a virgin and still have lain with a man and even gotten pregnant. But it is not proper to talk about such things.

21 The man, meanwhile, stood gazing at her. Better, "he was shocked on account of her." The idiom of one's mind being "devastated" to describe being mentally in suspense is found also (with a different root)

NAHMANIDES household" (v. 28). The servant rephrases what she said more politely when he repeats it in v. 47, but he too makes sure to mention that Bethuel was descended from the official wife.

17 The servant ran toward her. Rashi's comment, like the more extensive version in Genesis Rabbah, appears to stem from the fact that we are not told she "drew" the water. But this miracle was done for her only the first time, since in v. 20 she does have to draw the water. And in v. 45 the servant tells them that she drew water this first time as well. Perhaps he thought they would not believe him.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **16 Very beautiful.** Rather, she was "very fair" (OJPS) of complexion (Sforno). **She went down to the spring, filled her jar, and came up.** She did not waste time gossiping but got right to work (Abarbanel).

17 The servant ran toward her. She was so spry that she was already heading back to town with the water, so he had to run toward her—not "after" her, since he had stationed himself between the town and the well (Abarbanel).

18 Drink, my lord. She did all this even though she was ready to head home (Gersonides).

19 When she had let him drink his fill, she said. Waiting to do so until he had finished drinking. The Sages instruct us not to talk while we are eating and drinking, so nothing goes down the wrong way (Sforno). **I will also draw for your camels.** She was smart enough not to say, as he had in v. 14, "I will also water your camels"; instead, she said, "I will draw for them, and they can drink if they want to" (Abarbanel).

21 Silently. He did not want to say anything; he wanted to see whether she would fulfill the conditions of the test on her own (Gersonides). He did not tell her, as politeness would have required, not to put herself to the trouble (Sforno). **Wondering whether the LORD had made his errand successful or not.** For she might have been doing this in hopes of a reward (Sforno).

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NJPS had made his errand successful or not. 22When the camels had finished drinking, the man took a gold nose-ring weighing a half-shekel, and two gold bands for her arms, ten shekels in weight. 23"Pray tell me," he said, "whose daughter are you? Is there room in your father's house for us to spend the night?" 24She replied, "I am the daughter of Bethuel the son of Milcah, whom she bore to Nahor." 25And she went on, "There is plenty of straw and feed at home, and also room to spend the night." 26The man bowed low in homage

OJPS the LORD had made his journey prosperous or not. 22And it came to pass, as the camels had done drinking, that the man took a golden ring of half a shekel weight, and two bracelets for her hands of ten shekels weight of gold; 23and said: "Whose daughter art thou? tell me, I pray thee. Is there room in thy father's house for us to lodge in?" 24And she said unto him: "I am the daughter of Bethuel the son of Milcah, whom she bore unto Nahor." 25She said moreover unto him: "We have both straw and provender enough, and room to lodge in." 26And the man bowed his head, and

הַהִצְלִיחַ יְהוָה דַּרְכּוֹ אִם־לֹא׃ 22 וַיְהִי כַּאֲשֶׁר כִּלּוּ הַגְּמַלִּים לִשְׁתּוֹת וַיִּקַּח הָאִישׁ נֶזֶם זָהָב בֶּקַע מִשְׁקָלוֹ וּשְׁנֵי צְמִידִים עַל־יָדֶיהָ עֲשָׂרָה זָהָב מִשְׁקָלָם׃ 23 וַיֹּאמֶר בַּת־מִי אָתְּ הַגִּידִי נָא לִי הֲיֵשׁ בֵּית־אָבִיךְ מָקוֹם לָנוּ לָלִין׃ 24 וַתֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו בַּת־בְּתוּאֵל אָנֹכִי בֶּן־מִלְכָּה אֲשֶׁר יָלְדָה לְנָחוֹר׃ 25 וַתֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו גַּם־תֶּבֶן גַּם־מִסְפּוֹא רַב עִמָּנוּ גַּם־מָקוֹם לָלוּן׃ 26 וַיִּקֹּד

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why does Eliezer give her the "gold nose-ring" and the "gold bands" (v. 22) before finding out who she is and whether she is married—let alone whether she will go with him or not? ✦ What is the point of writing down the entire story as Eliezer repeated it to Bethuel and Laban? It would have been enough just to *tell* us that he repeated it.

RASHI not "to" her as one might think from the *l-* preposition.

22 A half-shekel. The text is hinting at the "half-shekel a head" (Exod. 38:26) that would later be used to count the Israelites. **Two gold bands.** Hinting at the double tablets of the law. **Ten shekels in weight.** Alluding to the Ten Commandments that would be on the tablets.

23 Pray tell me, whose daughter are you? He asked her only after giving her the gold, being certain that, through the merit of Abraham, the Holy One had made his errand successful. **To spend the night.** Rather, "for a night's stay." This word *lin* is a noun. But her reply in v. 25 uses the verb *lun*—to stay over, potentially for a number of nights.

24 I am the daughter of Bethuel. She answered his questions in order.

25 Feed. "Feed" is the more general term. Straw is one kind of feed; barley is another.

RASHBAM has nothing to do with the verb "to drink," where ת is part of the root; our verb has an א and that one does not. In any case, he had already had a drink before Rebekah offered to water his camels, which is what stunned him into wondering whether she was the one.

22 The man took a gold nose-ring. Presumably he only gave it to her after he had asked her, "Whose daughter are you?" (v. 23). This at least is what he himself says in v. 47. But the narrative here tells us this first in order not to interrupt the dialogue between them. **A half-shekel.** Literally a "halved" shekel, as in the verb from the same root, "hold out your arm over the sea and *split* it" (Exod. 14:16).

23 Is there room in your father's house for us to spend the night? More precisely, "Is there room in your father's house for us for a lodging?" The word *lin* here is a noun (describing a place to stay the night) of the same form as *riv* (a dispute, e.g., Deut. 25:1) or *din* (a court case, e.g., Deut. 17:8). But when she says "room to spend the night" (v. 25), she is using the verb *lun*, comparable to *kum* (to get up, e.g., 31:35) or *shuv* (to return, e.g., Exod. 4:21). She does not say "*for you* to spend the night," which is obvious (in Hebrew) when the verb form is used; only the noun the servant uses here requires that clarification. That is the straightforward explanation of the difference between the word in v. 25 and the one used here, according to Hebrew grammar.

25 There is plenty of straw. Which you did not ask for. **And also room to spend the night.** Which you did ask for. Notice that the Hebrew says "also straw and also feed" as well as "also room to spend the night." The Hebrew idiom is to repeat *gam* for both parts of a combination. See the Hebrew of "*neither* yours *nor* mine" (1 Kings 3:26).

KIMHI **22 The man took a gold nose-ring.** Just as he relates in v. 47, all he is doing here is *taking* the jewelry, to give it to her if it turns out that she belongs to Abraham's family.

23 To spend the night. The verb forms here and in her answer (v. 25) mean the same thing. He is asking if there is a place for his men and his camels to sleep. But it is not impossible that he is asking whether there is a place "to bed down the camels," using the verb transitively, and she is saying that there is a place for them "to bed down," intransitively.

25 There is plenty of straw and feed at home. He had not asked about this. But it reveals that she was a generous person. "Feed" is a general term referring to animal food other than straw: barley and oats.

26 The man bowed low in homage. More precisely, he "bowed and prostrated" (compare OJPS).

NAHMANIDES **22 The man took a gold nose-ring . . . and two gold bands for her arms.** He does not put them on her; he just "takes" them. He only put them on her after asking her who she was, just as he explains in v. 47. The fact that we are not told here that he put them on her is insignificant, the kind of detail that is often omitted in biblical narrative.

IBN EZRA in "Daniel, called Belteshazzar, was *perplexed* for a while" (Dan. 4:16). Our verb definitely has nothing to do with drinking.

22 A gold nose-ring. The Hebrew says merely "a golden ring" (OJPS); it sometimes refers to a nose-ring and sometimes to an earring. When it is a nose-ring, the ring does not go through the nose; it hangs by a cord tied around the forehead. **A half-shekel.** A "split." **Two gold bands.** Rather, "two double bracelets"; see my comment to Num. 19:15. Each of them consisted of two intertwined bands. Everyone has seen these.

23 To spend the night. The verb here is Hiphil; in v. 25 it is Qal. **[F]**

[F] See Special Topics, "Biblical Hebrew."

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **22 A half-shekel.** The Hebrew word occurs also in the "half-shekel a head" of Exod. 38:26 (Masorah).

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NJPS to the LORD 27and said, "Blessed be the LORD, the God of my master Abraham, who has not withheld His steadfast faithfulness from my master. For I have been guided on my errand by the LORD, to the house of my master's kinsmen."

28The maiden ran and told all this to her mother's household. 29Now Rebekah had a brother whose name was Laban. Laban ran out to the man at the spring—30when he saw the nose-ring and the bands on his sister's arms, and when he heard his sister Rebekah say, "Thus the man spoke to me." He went up to the man, who was still standing beside the camels at the spring. 31"Come in, O blessed of the LORD," he said, "why do you remain outside, when I have made ready the house and a place for the camels?" 32So the man entered the house, and the camels were unloaded. The camels were given straw and feed, and water was

הָאִישׁ וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ לַיהוָה׃ 27 וַיֹּאמֶר בָּרוּךְ
יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי אֲדֹנִי אַבְרָהָם אֲשֶׁר לֹא־עָזַב
חַסְדּוֹ וַאֲמִתּוֹ מֵעִם אֲדֹנִי אָנֹכִי בַּדֶּרֶךְ נָחַנִי
יְהוָה בֵּית אֲחֵי אֲדֹנִי׃
28 וַתָּרָץ הנער הַנַּעֲרָה וַתַּגֶּד לְבֵית אִמָּהּ
כַּדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה׃ 29 וּלְרִבְקָה אָח וּשְׁמוֹ
לָבָן וַיָּרָץ לָבָן אֶל־הָאִישׁ הַחוּצָה אֶל־
הָעָיִן׃ 30 וַיְהִי | כִּרְאֹת אֶת־הַנֶּזֶם וְאֶת־
הַצְּמִדִים עַל־יְדֵי אֲחֹתוֹ וּכְשָׁמְעוֹ אֶת־
דִּבְרֵי רִבְקָה אֲחֹתוֹ לֵאמֹר כֹּה־דִבֶּר אֵלַי
הָאִישׁ וַיָּבֹא אֶל־הָאִישׁ וְהִנֵּה עֹמֵד עַל־
הַגְּמַלִּים עַל־הָעָיִן׃ 31 וַיֹּאמֶר בּוֹא בְּרוּךְ
יְהוָה לָמָּה תַעֲמֹד בַּחוּץ וְאָנֹכִי פִּנִּיתִי
הַבַּיִת וּמָקוֹם לַגְּמַלִּים׃ 32 וַיָּבֹא הָאִישׁ
הַבַּיְתָה וַיְפַתַּח הַגְּמַלִּים וַיִּתֵּן תֶּבֶן

OJPS prostrated himself before the LORD. 27And he said: "Blessed be the LORD, the God of my master Abraham, who hath not forsaken His mercy and His truth toward my master; as for me, the LORD hath led me in the way to the house of my master's brethren."

28And the damsel ran, and told her mother's house according to these words. 29And Rebekah had a brother, and his name was Laban; and Laban ran out unto the man, unto the fountain. 30And it came to pass, when he saw the ring, and the bracelets upon his sister's hands, and when he heard the words of Rebekah his sister, saying: "Thus spoke the man unto me," that he came unto the man; and, behold, he stood by the camels at the fountain. 31And he said: "Come in, thou blessed of the LORD; wherefore standest thou without? for I have cleared the house, and made room for the camels." 32And the man came into the house, and he ungirded the camels; and he gave straw and provender for the camels,

RASHI **27 For I have been guided on my errand by the LORD.** Literally, "I am on the road [that] the Lord has guided me." "The" road in the sense of the road that was destined, the direct route—the road I needed to be on. "The" (indicated by the vowel under the preposition) always refers to something that is already known, or where it is obvious what one is speaking about.

28 To her mother's household. Rather, "to her mother's house" (compare OJPS). Women kept separate buildings in which to do their work. A daughter would naturally tell her mother, not her father.

29 Laban ran out to the man. Why did he run, and what was he running after? When he saw the "nose-ring" (v. 30), he thought, "This guy must be rich," and he aimed to get some of the money.

30 Who was still standing beside the camels. To take care of them, using the same verb and preposition as when Abraham "*waited on them* under the tree as they ate" (18:8).

31 I have made ready the house. Rather, "I have cleared the house" (OJPS) of idol worship.

32 The camels were unloaded. Rather, "he ungirded the camels" (OJPS), untied them. Remember that they had been muzzled so

RASHBAM **32 The camels were unloaded.** Rather, "ungirded" (OJPS); their harnesses were removed. Compare "Let not him who girds on his sword boast like him who *ungirds* it" (1 Kings 20:11).

IBN EZRA **32 Feed.** The word is a general term for animal food; barley (e.g.) would be one kind of "feed."

KIMHI **27 His steadfast faithfulness.** Rather, "His kindness and His reliability." If someone is aiming at doing good, it is only just that God should enable him to achieve it; that is His "reliability." But His "kindness" implies something additional—in this case, providing Isaac with a wife from his father's family. **I have been guided on my errand by the LORD.** Rather, "I was on a journey," not knowing where I would sleep, and "the Lord guided me" **to the house of my master's kinsmen.** In the plural, since Bethuel's father, Nahor, was Abraham's brother and Milcah, Bethuel's mother, was Abraham's niece. "Kinsmen" is the same word in Hebrew as "brother" of v. 48, though it is plural here and singular there. After thanking God and saying this, he gave her the gold jewelry.

28 The maiden ran. Joyfully. **And told all this.** Rather, "according to these words" (OJPS), in more or less the same words but not precisely, the way it is normal to tell a story. **Her mother's household.** A girl would naturally tell such things to her mother, not her father.

29 Now Rebekah had a brother. He is introduced in this way because he was not mentioned when Nahor's family was described in 22:20–24. But **Laban ran out to the man** only…

30 When he saw the nose-ring and the bands on his sister's arms. Telling us that he was envious of his sister, rushing to welcome the man into his home once he saw the gold. **Thus the man spoke to me.** Apparently he had told her the purpose of his errand.

31 Come in, O blessed of the LORD. Who has blessed you with wealth, as I can see.

NAHMANIDES **32 So the man entered the house.** "The man" being Eliezer. **And the camels were unloaded.** Rather, "and he ungirded the camels" (OJPS). That is, Laban did so, treating the guests as was proper, and he also fed the camels and brought the water so

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **27 His steadfast faithfulness.** More literally, "His mercy and His truth," that is, (unearned) kindness and faithfulness (to a *promise* of kindness). That is why Mic. 7:20 speaks of "kindness" for Abraham but "faithfulness" for his grandson Jacob (Gersonides).

29 Laban ran out to the man at the spring. Just to see the rich man who was passing through town (Sforno).

30 Thus the man spoke to me. She must have told him what she had heard Eliezer say in v. 27, so Laban knew that this was either Abraham's son or his servant (Abarbanel). **Who was still standing beside the camels at the spring.** He was taking care of the camels, not waiting to be invited in (Sforno).

31 O blessed of the LORD. The only other place a person is addressed by this phrase is in 26:29 (Masorah). Our Sages say that he was set free, moving from the category of "cursed" to that of "blessed," for having served Abraham so faithfully (Hizkuni).

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NJPS brought to bathe his feet and the feet of the men with him. 33But when food was set before him, he said, "I will not eat until I have told my tale." He said, "Speak, then."

34"I am Abraham's servant," he began. 35"The LORD has greatly blessed my master, and he has become rich: He has given him sheep and cattle, silver and gold, male and female slaves, camels and asses. 36And Sarah, my master's wife, bore my master a son in her old age, and he has assigned to him everything he owns. 37Now my master made me swear, saying, 'You shall not get a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites in whose land I dwell; 38but you shall go to my father's house, to my kindred, and get a wife for my son.' 39And I said to my master, 'What if the woman does not follow

OJPS and water to wash his feet and the feet of the men that were with him. 33And there was set food before him to eat; but he said: "I will not eat, until I have told mine errand." And he said: "Speak on."

34And he said: "I am Abraham's servant. 35And the LORD hath blessed my master greatly; and he is become great; and He hath given him flocks and herds, and silver and gold, and men-servants and maid-servants, and camels and asses. 36And Sarah my master's wife bore a son to my master when she was old; and unto him hath he given all that he hath. 37And my master made me swear, saying: Thou shalt not take a wife for my son of the daughters of the Canaanites, in whose land I dwell. 38But thou shalt go unto my father's house, and to my kindred, and take a wife for my son. 39And I said unto my master: Peradventure the woman will not follow

וּמְסִפּוֹא֙ לַגְּמַלִּ֔ים וּמַ֖יִם לִרְחֹ֣ץ רַגְלָ֑יו וְרַגְלֵ֥י הָאֲנָשִׁ֖ים אֲשֶׁר אִתּ֑וֹ׃ 33 וַיּוּשֶׂם לְפָנָיו֙ לֶאֱכֹ֔ל וַיֹּ֖אמֶר לֹ֣א אֹכַ֑ל עַ֚ד אִם־דִּבַּ֣רְתִּי דְבָרָ֔י וַיֹּ֥אמֶר דַּבֵּֽר׃ 34 וַיֹּ֖אמֶר עֶ֣בֶד אַבְרָהָ֑ם אָנֹֽכִי׃ 35 וַיהוָ֞ה בֵּרַ֣ךְ אֶת־אֲדֹנִ֗י מְאֹד֙ וַיִּגְדָּ֔ל וַיִּתֶּן־לוֹ֙ צֹ֣אן וּבָקָ֔ר וְכֶ֖סֶף וְזָהָ֑ב וַעֲבָדִ֥ם וּשְׁפָח֖וֹת וּגְמַלִּ֥ים וַחֲמֹרִֽים׃ 36 וַתֵּ֤לֶד שָׂרָה֙ אֵ֣שֶׁת אֲדֹנִ֔י בֵּ֖ן לַאדֹנִ֑י אַחֲרֵ֣י זִקְנָתָ֔הּ וַיִּתֶּן־לוֹ֖ אֶת־כָּל־אֲשֶׁר־לֽוֹ׃ 37 וַיַּשְׁבִּעֵ֖נִי אֲדֹנִ֣י לֵאמֹ֑ר לֹא־תִקַּ֨ח אִשָּׁ֜ה לִבְנִ֗י מִבְּנ֤וֹת הַֽכְּנַעֲנִי֙ אֲשֶׁ֣ר אָנֹכִ֣י יֹשֵׁ֔ב בְּאַרְצֽוֹ׃ 38 אִם־לֹ֗א אֶל־בֵּ֤ית־אָבִי֙ תֵּלֵ֔ךְ וְאֶל־מִשְׁפַּחְתִּ֖י וְלָקַחְתָּ֥ אִשָּׁ֖ה לִבְנִֽי׃ 39 וָאֹמַ֖ר אֶל־אֲדֹנִ֑י אֻלַ֛י לֹא־תֵלֵ֥ךְ

RASHI that they would not graze on other people's fields during the trip.

33 Until I have told my tale. Literally, "until *if* I have told my tale." "If" here is the equivalent of "that," and *ki* is used exactly this way in 49:10. Remember that "if" is one of the four meanings of *ki*. **[B]** Said R. Aha: The conversation of the Patriarchs' servants is more pleasing to the Holy One than the Torah of their descendants. The story of Eliezer is double the length it needs to be, while many basic Torah doctrines are barely hinted at.

36 He has assigned to him everything he owns. He showed them the deed of gift.

37 You shall not get a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites. Unless you first go to my father's house and she refuses to follow you.

39 What if the woman does not follow me? "What if" (*ulai*) is spelled without the usual ו vowel letter, permitting it also to be read as *elai*, "to me." Eliezer had a daughter of his own and was trying to find a pretext that would persuade Abraham to turn "to me," to

[B] See Rashi's comment to 18:15.

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why does Eliezer say that Abraham made him swear to go "to my father's house, to my kindred" (v. 38), when he really said, "to the land of my birth" (v. 4)?

RASHBAM **33 Until I have told my tale.** Having seen that the Holy One approved what he had suggested, he had no business eating or drinking first.

35 The LORD has greatly blessed my master. This is why we were told that "the LORD had blessed Abraham in all things" (v. 1). **And he has become rich.** So everyone in the kingdom wants to be related to him by marriage. But he himself does not want this.

36 He has assigned to him everything he owns. His brothers will not get any share of it.

IBN EZRA **34 I am Abraham's servant.** Some think he is explaining why he would not eat: "There are some foods that are forbidden to us." But he himself explained why he does not want to eat yet.

KIMHI **33 He said.** He, Laban or Bethuel.

34 I am Abraham's servant. Don't think all this wealth belongs to me.

35 The LORD has greatly blessed my master, and he has become rich. So much so that even I, his servant, can travel with all the wealth you see.

37 Now my master made me swear. In case you are wondering why I have come all the way here. For he could easily have found his son a wife from among the daughters of the great men of that land, but he wanted one from his own family.

39 What if the woman does not follow me? Despite the midrash about Eliezer and his daughter, we cannot put such interpretive weight on every missing or additional vowel letter. And, after all, he told them the story in such a way as to make it impossible for them to

NAHMANIDES Eliezer and his men could wash (see "he gave" of OJPS). It is extremely improbable that it was Eliezer doing all this. For similar examples where the subject switches without explicit mention, see 37:28 and 2 Sam. 9:11; there are many others of the kind. It is not clear whether "ungirding" them means taking them out of the harnesses by which they were led or taking off the saddles their riders sat on. As for Rashi's explanation, the passage in Genesis Rabbah that offers it also refutes it: "If the donkey of R. Phinehas b. Jair was so meticulous about the law, Abraham's would have been even more so!" There would have been no need to muzzle them; "no mischief befalls the righteous" (Prov. 12:21).

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **33 I will not eat until I have told my tale.** If they said no, he would not "eat the bread of wickedness" (Prov. 4:17) but would leave immediately. I would add that those who study Eliezer's tale carefully will discover why this seeming repetition is included in the Torah: to demonstrate his sagacity. He makes 10 alterations in it from what we have already read, each for a specific reason. For example, he does not repeat what Abraham said about the Lord taking him "from my father's house and from my native land" (v. 7); they might think this reflected badly on them (Abarbanel).

34 I am Abraham's servant. Could he really not have waited to tell his tale until after he had eaten? In fact, no. "I must not eat or drink anything for myself until I have fulfilled my master's orders" (Bekhor Shor).

36 In her old age. So he has been beloved since the moment he was born (Sforno).

37 Now my master made me swear, saying, "You shall not get a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites." In case you are wondering why Isaac is not married already (Abarbanel).

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The Commentators' Bible: Genesis : The Rubin JPS Miqra'ot Gedolot, edited by Michael Carasik, The Jewish Publication Society, 2018. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/dtl/detail.action?docID=5492895.
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NJPS me?' [40]He replied to me, 'The LORD, whose ways I have followed, will send His angel with you and make your errand successful; and you will get a wife for my son from my kindred, from my father's house. [41]Thus only shall you be freed from my adjuration: if, when you come to my kindred, they refuse you—only then shall you be freed from my adjuration.'

[42]"I came today to the spring, and I said: O LORD, God of my master Abraham, if You would indeed grant success to the errand on which I am engaged! [43]As I stand by the spring of water, let the young woman who comes out to draw and to whom I say, 'Please, let me drink a little water from your jar,' [44]and who answers, 'You may drink, and I will also draw for your camels'—let her be the wife whom the LORD has decreed for my master's son.' [45]I had scarcely finished praying in my heart, when Rebekah came out with her jar on her shoulder, and went down to the spring and drew. And I said to her, 'Please give me a drink.' [46]She quickly lowered her jar and said, 'Drink, and I will also water your camels.' So I drank, and she also watered the camels. [47]I inquired of her, 'Whose daughter are you?' And she said, 'The daughter of Bethuel, son of Nahor,

הָאִשָּׁה אַחֲרָי׃ 40 וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלַי יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר־
הִתְהַלַּכְתִּי לְפָנָיו יִשְׁלַח מַלְאָכוֹ אִתָּךְ
וְהִצְלִיחַ דַּרְכֶּךָ וְלָקַחְתָּ אִשָּׁה לִבְנִי
מִמִּשְׁפַּחְתִּי וּמִבֵּית אָבִי׃ 41 אָז תִּנָּקֶה
מֵאָלָתִי כִּי תָבוֹא אֶל־מִשְׁפַּחְתִּי וְאִם־לֹא
יִתְּנוּ לָךְ וְהָיִיתָ נָקִי מֵאָלָתִי׃
42 וָאָבֹא הַיּוֹם אֶל־הָעַיִן וָאֹמַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי
אֲדֹנִי אַבְרָהָם אִם־יֶשְׁךָ־נָא מַצְלִיחַ דַּרְכִּי
אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי הֹלֵךְ עָלֶיהָ׃ 43 הִנֵּה אָנֹכִי נִצָּב
עַל־עֵין הַמָּיִם וְהָיָה הָעַלְמָה הַיֹּצֵאת
לִשְׁאֹב וְאָמַרְתִּי אֵלֶיהָ הַשְׁקִינִי־נָא מְעַט־
מַיִם מִכַּדֵּךְ׃ 44 וְאָמְרָה אֵלַי גַּם־אַתָּה
שְׁתֵה וְגַם לִגְמַלֶּיךָ אֶשְׁאָב הִוא הָאִשָּׁה
אֲשֶׁר־הֹכִיחַ יְהוָה לְבֶן־אֲדֹנִי׃ 45 אֲנִי טֶרֶם
אֲכַלֶּה לְדַבֵּר אֶל־לִבִּי וְהִנֵּה רִבְקָה יֹצֵאת
וְכַדָּהּ עַל־שִׁכְמָהּ וַתֵּרֶד הָעֵינָה וַתִּשְׁאָב
וָאֹמַר אֵלֶיהָ הַשְׁקִינִי נָא׃ 46 וַתְּמַהֵר וַתּוֹרֶד
כַּדָּהּ מֵעָלֶיהָ וַתֹּאמֶר שְׁתֵה וְגַם־גְּמַלֶּיךָ
אַשְׁקֶה וָאֶשְׁתְּ וְגַם הַגְּמַלִּים הִשְׁקָתָה׃
47 וָאֶשְׁאַל אֹתָהּ וָאֹמַר בַּת־מִי אָתְּ וַתֹּאמֶר
בַּת־בְּתוּאֵל בֶּן־נָחוֹר אֲשֶׁר יָלְדָה־לּוֹ

OJPS me. [40]And he said unto me: The LORD, before whom I walk, will send His angel with thee, and prosper thy way; and thou shalt take a wife for my son of my kindred, and of my father's house; [41]then shalt thou be clear from my oath, when thou comest to my kindred; and if they give her not to thee, thou shalt be clear from my oath.

[42]And I came this day unto the fountain, and said: O LORD, the God of my master Abraham, if now Thou do prosper my way which I go: [43]behold, I stand by the fountain of water; and let it come to pass, that the maiden that cometh forth to draw, to whom I shall say: Give me, I pray thee, a little water from thy pitcher to drink; [44]and she shall say to me: Both drink thou, and I will also draw for thy camels; let the same be the woman whom the LORD hath appointed for my master's son. [45]And before I had done speaking to my heart, behold, Rebekah came forth with her pitcher on her shoulder; and she went down unto the fountain, and drew. And I said unto her: Let me drink, I pray thee. [46]And she made haste, and let down her pitcher from her shoulder, and said: Drink, and I will give thy camels drink also. So I drank, and she made the camels drink also. [47]And I asked her, and said: Whose daughter art thou? And she said: The daughter of Bethuel, Nahor's son, whom Milcah bore unto

RASHI marry his daughter to Isaac. Abraham told him, "My son is blessed and you are cursed. **[C]** The cursed cannot connect with the blessed."

42 I came today. Literally, "the [same] day." I came on the same day I left. — This is the source of the tradition that the earth folded up for Eliezer. **[D]**

44 You may drink, and I will also draw for your camels. "Also" is used in both parts of this phrase; compare "both . . . and" of OJPS: "You also may drink." She meant: You and also the men who are with you. **Whom the LORD has decreed.** "Whom He has clarified and made known as the wife for my master's son." The Hebrew verb always implies clarification.

45 I had scarcely finished. More precisely, "I could scarcely finish." But the past and future tenses of Biblical Hebrew can both indicate the present in situations of this kind.

47 I inquired of her. He says that he inquired first and gave her the gold afterward, which is not what he did in vv. 22–23. He did not want them to quibble with him and ask, "How could you give them to her before you knew who she was?"

[C] Eliezer is understood to be a Canaanite. **[D]** When the earth "folds up," two distant places can be just steps apart.

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why does he say he asked for "the wife whom the LORD has decreed for my master's son" (v. 44) and not include what he also said, "Thereby shall I know that You have dealt graciously with my master" (v. 14)? ✦ Why does he say that he "put the ring on her nose and the bands on her arms" (v. 47) *after* asking who she was, when vv. 22–23 have told us he did so *before* asking? (All these are just some of the changes Eliezer made when he told the story.)

RASHBAM **40 The LORD . . . will send His angel.** I know they will give her to you.

42 I said: O LORD, God of my master Abraham, if You would indeed grant success to the errand on which I am engaged! He is going on at such length to make sure they understand that "the matter was decreed by the LORD" (v. 50).

IBN EZRA **41 Thus only shall you be freed from my adjuration.** He does not say "oath" (v. 8) but calls it an "adjuration," which implies a curse. He is saying, "I am afraid of my master and his curse."

KIMHI say no. The fact that his telling of the story is not word-for-word the same as in the previous version is of no account; that is what the Torah does when it repeats a text, giving the same ideas in different words. Even with the Ten Commandments, the most basic principles of the Torah, the version in Deuteronomy 5 uses different wording than the original text in Exodus 20.

NAHMANIDES **45 When Rebekah came out with her jar on her shoulder.** Though the text does not say so, he must have heard her name mentioned once he entered the house (or perhaps she herself had already told him her name).

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **41 Then shall you be freed from my adjuration.** The servant is telling them: You cannot extort more money out of me; I have done what I had to do, and am freed from the adjuration (Bekhor Shor).

43 The young woman. The Hebrew phrase occurs also only in Exod. 2:8 and Isa. 7:14 (Masorah). He used the Aramaic word because he thought that was the only language they knew. But they call her "the maiden" in v. 55, so evidently they knew Hebrew too (Hizkuni).

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NJPS whom Milcah bore to him.' And I put the ring on her nose and the bands on her arms. 48Then I bowed low in homage to the LORD and blessed the LORD, the God of my master Abraham, who led me on the right way to get the daughter of my master's brother for his son. 49And now, if you mean to treat my master with true kindness, tell me; and if not, tell me also, that I may turn right or left."

50Then Laban and Bethuel answered, "The matter was decreed by the LORD; we cannot speak to you bad or good. 51Here is Rebekah before you; take her and go, and let her be a wife to your master's son, as the LORD has spoken." 52When Abraham's servant heard their words, he bowed low to the ground before the LORD. 53The servant brought out objects of silver and gold, and garments, and gave them to Rebekah; and he gave presents to her brother and

מִלְכָּה וְאָשֶׁם הַנָּזֶם עַל־אַפָּהּ וְהַצְּמִידִים
עַל־יָדֶיהָ׃ 48 וָאֶקֹּד וָאֲשְׁתַּחֲוֶה לַיהוָה
וָאֲבָרֵךְ אֶת־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי אֲדֹנִי אַבְרָהָם
אֲשֶׁר הִנְחַנִי בְּדֶרֶךְ אֱמֶת לָקַחַת אֶת־בַּת־
אֲחִי אֲדֹנִי לִבְנוֹ׃ 49 וְעַתָּה אִם־יֶשְׁכֶם
עֹשִׂים חֶסֶד וֶאֱמֶת אֶת־אֲדֹנִי הַגִּידוּ לִי
וְאִם־לֹא הַגִּידוּ לִי וְאֶפְנֶה עַל־יָמִין אוֹ
עַל־שְׂמֹאל׃
50 וַיַּעַן לָבָן וּבְתוּאֵל וַיֹּאמְרוּ מֵיְהוָה יָצָא
הַדָּבָר לֹא נוּכַל דַּבֵּר אֵלֶיךָ רַע אוֹ־טוֹב׃
51 הִנֵּה־רִבְקָה לְפָנֶיךָ קַח וָלֵךְ וּתְהִי אִשָּׁה
לְבֶן־אֲדֹנֶיךָ כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר יְהוָה׃ 52 וַיְהִי
כַּאֲשֶׁר שָׁמַע עֶבֶד אַבְרָהָם אֶת־דִּבְרֵיהֶם
וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ אַרְצָה לַיהוָה׃ 53 וַיּוֹצֵא הָעֶבֶד ✦ חמישי
כְּלֵי־כֶסֶף וּכְלֵי זָהָב וּבְגָדִים וַיִּתֵּן לְרִבְקָה

OJPS him. And I put the ring upon her nose, and the bracelets upon her hands. 48And I bowed my head, and prostrated myself before the LORD, and blessed the LORD, the God of my master Abraham, who had led me in the right way to take my master's brother's daughter for his son. 49And now if ye will deal kindly and truly with my master, tell me; and if not, tell me; that I may turn to the right hand, or to the left."

50Then Laban and Bethuel answered and said: "The thing proceedeth from the LORD; we cannot speak unto thee bad or good. 51Behold, Rebekah is before thee, take her, and go, and let her be thy master's son's wife, as the LORD hath spoken." 52And it came to pass, that, when Abraham's servant heard their words, he bowed himself down to the earth unto the LORD. 53And the servant brought forth jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and raiment, and gave them to Rebekah; he gave also to her

RASHI **49 That I may turn right.** For one of the daughters of Ishmael. **Or left.** For one of the daughters of Lot, who was living to the left of Abraham. **[E]** (See Genesis Rabbah.)

50 Then Laban and Bethuel answered. Laban was wicked, so he jumped in to answer before his father. **We cannot speak to you bad or good.** We cannot refuse, either with a bad argument or with a good and proper one, since (according to your story) this was decreed by the Lord and He arranged for you to encounter her.

52 He bowed low to the ground. We learn from this that one bows when hearing good news.

53 Presents. The Hebrew word refers specifically to fruits. He brought with him various kinds of fruit from the land of Israel.

[E] In biblical terms, the front/top direction was not north but east. Lot lived to the left (the north) of Abraham and Ishmael to the right (the south).

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ How do Laban and Bethuel know that "the matter was decreed by the LORD" (v. 50)? ✦ Why can they not speak "bad or good" about it? They could certainly at least say they think what the Lord wants is good. ✦ How could they say of Rebekah, "take her and go, and let her be a wife to your master's son, as the LORD has spoken" (v. 51)? When did the Lord speak this?

RASHBAM **48 Who led me on the right way.** Rather, "who led me reliably." For the promise of the Holy One to deal graciously with my master Abraham and his son was a reliable one.

49 Right or left. To my master's other relatives.

50 We cannot speak to you bad or good. Neither preventing this nor making it happen depends on our agreement; it is beyond our control, whether we are willing or not. The Holy One has done it, and He has the power to do what He likes.

53 Objects of silver and gold. That is, women's jewelry: "such *articles* of gold as each of us came upon: armlets, bracelets, signet rings, earrings, and pendants" (Num. 31:50). We know that this is women's jewelry because our exact phrase is used in "Each woman shall borrow from her neighbor and the lodger in her house objects of silver and gold" (Exod. 3:22).

KIMHI **49 True kindness.** Using the same combination of words as in "steadfast faithfulness" of v. 27, dealing "kindly and truly" (OJPS)—"truly" in the sense that you have an obligation to the family and all the more so to Abraham, the greatest of your family; "kindly" in that it is beyond the call of duty for you to send your daughter off to a foreign country. **That I may turn right or left.** To get another woman of this country, whether greater or lesser, since he does not want his son to have a Canaanite wife.

50 Then Laban and Bethuel answered. The text mentions Laban first because Bethuel was old and Laban bore the burden of running the house. **We cannot speak to you bad or good.** We cannot say yes or no. It is obviously in God's hands.

52 He bowed low to the ground. Stretched out at full length.

53 The servant brought out objects of silver and gold. Now that they had agreed to let her go with him. **Presents.** "Precious things" (OJPS) of all kinds. **To her brother and her mother.** As representatives of the family. Again, her father, Bethuel, was an old man.

IBN EZRA **49 True kindness.** More precisely, "reliable kindness." The final ת of the Hebrew word for "true" is a feminine ending that conceals the true root of this word: אמן, relating to something that is faithful or reliable. "Kindness" refers to something that one is not in fact obligated to do.

51 As the LORD has spoken. That is, as He has "decreed." Compare the related noun in "by the *word* of the LORD the heavens were made" (Ps. 33:6). Or it may literally mean that the Lord had spoken in a dream. **[G]**

53 Presents. The word may indeed be related to "luscious fruits" of Song 4:13, or the נ missing in that word but found in ours could be a root letter (for the form of the word, with a different root, compare the "shawls" of Isa. 3:22), in which case our word would most likely refer to fine raiment.

[G] See Ibn Ezra's comment to v. 14.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **50 Then Laban and Bethuel answered.** Perhaps speaking last was a sign of respect, as in the deliberations of a rabbinic court, where the youngest scholars speak first (Abarbanel).

51 Take her and go. Without our permission (Bekhor Shor).

53 The servant brought out objects of silver and gold. These were the bridal gifts, and would return with him to Canaan in any case (Bekhor Shor). **Garments.** Rather, "fruits," and not just fruit but balm and honey as well (Bekhor Shor). The fruits were from Damascus as well as from the land of Israel (Abarbanel). **To her brother and her mother.** Who needed to be persuaded. No gifts were

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NJPS her mother. [54]Then he and the men with him ate and drank, and they spent the night. When they arose next morning, he said, "Give me leave to go to my master." [55]But her brother and her mother said, "Let the maiden remain with us some ten days; then you may go." [56]He said to them, "Do not delay me, now that the LORD has made my errand successful. Give me leave that I may go to my master." [57]And they said, "Let us call the girl and ask for her reply." [58]They called Rebekah and said to her, "Will you go with this man?" And she said, "I will." [59]So they sent off their sister Rebekah and her nurse along with Abraham's servant

וּמִגְדָּנֹת נָתַן לְאָחִיהָ וּלְאִמָּהּ׃ 54 וַיֹּאכְלוּ וַיִּשְׁתּוּ הוּא וְהָאֲנָשִׁים אֲשֶׁר־עִמּוֹ וַיָּלִינוּ וַיָּקוּמוּ בַבֹּקֶר וַיֹּאמֶר שַׁלְּחֻנִי לַאדֹנִי׃ 55 וַיֹּאמֶר אָחִיהָ וְאִמָּהּ תֵּשֶׁב הנער הַנַּעֲרָה אִתָּנוּ יָמִים אוֹ עָשׂוֹר אַחַר תֵּלֵךְ׃ 56 וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם אַל־תְּאַחֲרוּ אֹתִי וַיהוָה הִצְלִיחַ דַּרְכִּי שַׁלְּחוּנִי וְאֵלְכָה לַאדֹנִי׃ 57 וַיֹּאמְרוּ נִקְרָא לנער לַנַּעֲרָה וְנִשְׁאֲלָה אֶת־פִּיהָ׃ 58 וַיִּקְרְאוּ לְרִבְקָה וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵלֶיהָ הֲתֵלְכִי עִם־הָאִישׁ הַזֶּה וַתֹּאמֶר אֵלֵךְ׃ 59 וַיְשַׁלְּחוּ אֶת־רִבְקָה אֲחֹתָם וְאֶת־מֵנִקְתָּהּ וְאֶת־

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why do they ask Rebekah, "Will you go with this man?" (v. 58)? They had already agreed on this in v. 51, and she had already accepted the presents in v. 53. The dispute now was only about whether she would "remain with us some 10 months" (as v. 55 really means).

RASHI **54 They spent the night.** Using the verb *lin*, which means "to spend one night."

55 But her brother and her mother said. Where was her father Bethuel? He wanted to interfere, and an angel came and put him to death. **Some ten days.** Literally, "days or a ten" (compare OJPS). But "days" is the biblical idiom for "a year," e.g., "the redemption period shall be *a year*" (Lev. 25:29). The custom was to allow a virgin a year to prepare her trousseau. "A ten," therefore, must refer to 10 months. It cannot mean "a few days, or ten" (the Hebrew does not say "at least"). People do not ask for something small and, when turned down, ask for even more.

57 Let us call the girl and ask for her reply. From this we learn that one cannot marry off a woman against her will.

58 I will. Literally, "I will go" (OJPS)—even if you do not want me to.

KIMHI **55 But her brother and her mother said.** The Hebrew verb matches just the first noun of the compound subject. Compare the Hebrew of "Miriam and Aaron spoke" (Num. 12:1) and "Queen Esther daughter of Abihail and Mordecai wrote a second letter" (Esther 9:29).

57 Let us call the girl. For if we ask her without you being present, you might suspect that we are preventing her from going with you. **And ask for her reply.** About whether she will go with you right away. — They must already have asked her whether she was willing to marry Isaac before they told him "take her and go" (v. 51), since a woman cannot be married off without her consent. The Sages say further: It is forbidden for a man to marry off his daughter when she is a minor. She must come of age and say, "I want So-and-So."

59 Rebekah and her nurse along with Abraham's servant and his men. Of Rebekah's "maids" (v. 61), only the nurse is mentioned, the most important of them. All these were deserving of the send-off that is described here.

OJPS brother and to her mother precious things. [54]And they did eat and drink, he and the men that were with him, and tarried all night; and they rose up in the morning, and he said: "Send me away unto my master." [55]And her brother and her mother said: "Let the damsel abide with us a few days, at the least ten; after that she shall go." [56]And he said unto them: "Delay me not, seeing the LORD hath prospered my way; send me away that I may go to my master." [57]And they said: "We will call the damsel, and inquire at her mouth." [58]And they called Rebekah, and said unto her: "Wilt thou go with this man?" And she said: "I will go." [59]And they sent away Rebekah their sister, and her nurse, and Abraham's servant,

RASHBAM **56 Now that the LORD has made my errand successful.** The Holy One wants no delay; that would lessen the success.

57 Let us call the girl and ask for her reply. To see whether she wants to stay for a year or so or to leave immediately, as you propose.

58 They called Rebekah and said to her, "Will you go with this man?" This was the polite thing to do. They were asking her, "Even though the Holy One wants this match—Will you go with this man? Or will you wait a while and go with someone else?" This, despite what we read in M. Ket. 5:2: "A virgin is allowed twelve months in which to prepare her trousseau." **And she said, "I will."** I have no intention of delaying just to adorn myself.

IBN EZRA **55 Her brother and her mother said.** It was also they who accepted the "presents" (v. 53); the father is keeping silent. It may be that the son was wiser and more respected than the father. He is certainly mentioned before his father in v. 50.

59 Her nurse. The woman who had nursed her in days gone by.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS necessary for Bethuel, who was Isaac's cousin and would be happy to have his daughter marry him (Bekhor Shor). It was not customary in those days to give such gifts to the father (Gersonides). They were upset at having been given nothing but fruit, and were hoping to get some gold or silver out of him (Abarbanel).

55 Her brother and her mother. Again, Bethuel wanted this marriage to happen and had no desire to delay it: "Better that I give her to you than that I should give her to an outsider." That is why all this part of the arrangement is being made with the mother—but, for reasons of modesty, with her son speaking for her. Men do not ordinarily speak about cosmetics and such things (Bekhor Shor). The midrash Rashi cites, that an angel came and put him to death, has a little more detail: he tried to poison Eliezer so that he could get the money—but Gabriel switched the dishes (Hizkuni). **Let the maiden remain with us.** Even though they have already told him to "take her and go" (v. 51), they did not realize that he was empowered to enact the betrothal. They thought he would take her to Isaac to do that. But now that she was already betrothed, they wanted her to remain for a while (Hizkuni). They thought she should stay for a while, to fill her eyes with the sights of her family and her home; after all, she was going far away and might never return (Gersonides).

56 Do not delay me, now that the LORD has made my errand successful. She will have more cosmetics in my master's house than she will here (Bekhor Shor).

58 Will you go with this man? The question was not whether she wanted to marry Isaac, but whether she was willing to go now, without her mother and brother, or, more respectably, in a year or so, with them (Abarbanel). **I will.** She had no problem leaving her family (Gersonides).

59 So they sent off their sister Rebekah. Since she had rejected them, none of them had any desire to accompany her, even part way (Abarbanel). **And her nurse.** We are being prepared to learn of her death in 35:8 (Hizkuni). Such was the custom in those days (Gersonides). Since that was the custom, the nurse at least was willing to go with her (Abarbanel).

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NJPS and his men. 60And they blessed Rebekah and said to her,

"O sister!
May you grow
Into thousands of myriads;
May your offspring seize
The gates of their foes."

61Then Rebekah and her maids arose, mounted the camels, and followed the man. So the servant took Rebekah and went his way.

62Isaac had just come back from the vicinity of Beer-lahai-roi, for he was settled

OJPS and his men. 60And they blessed Rebekah, and said unto her:

"Our sister,
be thou the mother
of thousands of ten thousands,
and let thy seed possess the
gate of those that hate them."

61And Rebekah arose, and her damsels, and they rode upon the camels, and followed the man. And the servant took Rebekah, and went his way.

62And Isaac came from the way of Beer-lahai-roi; for he dwelt in the land of the

עֶבֶד אַבְרָהָם וְאֶת־אֲנָשָׁיו׃ 60 וַיְבָרֲכוּ אֶת־
רִבְקָה וַיֹּאמְרוּ לָהּ
אֲחֹתֵנוּ
אַתְּ הֲיִי
לְאַלְפֵי רְבָבָה
וְיִירַשׁ זַרְעֵךְ
אֵת שַׁעַר שֹׂנְאָיו׃
61 וַתָּקָם רִבְקָה וְנַעֲרֹתֶיהָ וַתִּרְכַּבְנָה עַל־
הַגְּמַלִּים וַתֵּלַכְנָה אַחֲרֵי הָאִישׁ וַיִּקַּח
הָעֶבֶד אֶת־רִבְקָה וַיֵּלֶךְ׃
62 וְיִצְחָק בָּא מִבּוֹא בְּאֵר לַחַי רֹאִי וְהוּא

RASHI **60 May you grow into thousands of myriads. [F]**

62 From the vicinity of Beer-lahai-roi. Where he had gone to get Hagar, to bring her to his father Abraham so he could marry her. **He was settled in the region of the Negeb.** Near Beer-lahai-roi. Remember that "Abraham journeyed from there to the

[F] Our texts of Rashi include a version of the explanation that Rashbam attributes to Joseph Kara.

RASHBAM **60 May you grow into thousands of myriads; may your offspring seize the gates of their foes.** May those descendants of whom it was said "your descendants shall seize the gates of their foes" (22:17) come forth from you. This is how Joseph Kara explains it.

62 Isaac had just come back from the vicinity of Beer-lahai-roi. The "approach" to Beer-lahai-roi (as our phrase literally says) does indeed mean "the vicinity." Compare *"as far as* Sodom" (10:19). Isaac had arrived that same day. **For he was settled in the region of the Negeb.** Which is where Beer-lahai-roi is, as we know from 16:7 (the "spring" there is Beer-lahai-roi) and 20:1.

KIMHI **60 And they blessed Rebekah.** When they had accompanied her on the way for a while and were ready to part with her. **Thousands of myriads.** A myriad is ten thousand, but the number is not meant precisely; that is the largest number word in Hebrew.

61 Rebekah and her maids. Her nurse is included in that category. **Mounted the camels.** After they had accompanied Rebekah on her way for a while and parted with her. Only then did they mount the camels. It would not have been polite to ride while the others were on foot. In fact, the text is telling us this in order to teach us how to behave properly. **And followed the man.** Who knew the way. **So the servant took Rebekah.** At his side, not letting her get a foot away from him, he so loved and honored her.

62 Isaac had just come back. Rather, "Isaac was coming back." He encountered them on the way, before they reached the city, just as this whole story has been one of "coincidence" directed by God's will. All this lets us know that God treats good people well, though they are completely unaware of the good in store for them until it reaches them. **From the vicinity of Beer-lahai-roi.** Rather, "from going to Beer-lahai-roi," where he had livestock or some other business. He was coming back from such a trip (which he made regularly) and stayed for the night somewhere along the way. **For he was settled in the region of the Negeb.** In Hebron, with his father.

IBN EZRA **61 Rebekah and her maids . . . mounted the camels.** Which the servant had brought. **So the servant took Rebekah and went his way.** He went along with Rebekah and thought nothing more of it until Isaac showed up. The vowel of "went his way" is pausal, though not as long as an ordinary pausal vowel since the original vowel in this word is extremely short; the vowel cannot lengthen by two degrees at once. You will find exactly this same phenomenon in the word that means "he said" when it precedes a pause.

62 From the vicinity of Beer-lahai-roi. Rather, "from Bo, [that is, from] Beer-lahai-roi." The place had two names. But some think it means "from within Beer-lahai-roi," understanding the word based on the way it is used in "Every house is shut, none *enters*" (Isa. 24:10). To me, the obvious sense is that it is the infinitive construct of the verb: he came back *from coming* to Beer-lahai-roi. **He was settled in the region of the Negeb.** That is, "the South" (OJPS) of Israel. In those days, at least, that was where he was living.

NAHMANIDES **61 Then Rebekah and her maids arose.** Rather (since the verb is singular), "Rebekah arose, and [she summoned] her maids" (compare OJPS). **Mounted the camels, and followed the man.** Since he knew the way. These verbs are plural. **So the servant took Rebekah and went his way.** Once they had left the city, the servant proactively took Rebekah under his particular care, to protect her during the journey. And see Ibn Ezra's comment.

62 Isaac had just come back from the vicinity of Beer-lahai-roi. Rather, he "had just come back from going to Beer-lahai-roi." If "going to" had been omitted, the text could be understood to say, "Isaac had just come from Beer-lahai-roi"—as if he lived there—since "back" is not in the Hebrew (see OJPS). But he was in fact coming back home from a trip there. The Hebrew phraseology could imply that this was a trip he regularly took; and in fact Beer-lahai-roi was a regular place of prayer for Isaac on account of the appearance of the angel there. **[G]** His home, in the Negeb, was not far from there. Onkelos thinks

[G] See 16:7–14.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **60 May you grow into thousands of myriads.** She was going to a foreign country and leaving her family—both of which tend to limit the number of offspring (Gersonides). **May your offspring seize the gates of their foes.** The living God must have put these words in their mouths, since Abraham was told precisely this in 22:17 (Abarbanel).

61 So the servant took Rebekah. This he did only when they were getting toward the end of their journey; he wanted to make sure everything would be all right with her when they met his master. Up until then, out of modesty, she had ridden behind him with the others (Gersonides). That is, he took her in marriage on Isaac's behalf, which also made him her servant (Sforno).

62 From the vicinity of Beer-lahai-roi. More precisely, "from the approach to Beer-lahai-roi," the outskirts (Hizkuni).

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יוֹשֵׁב בְּאֶרֶץ הַנֶּגֶב׃ 63 וַיֵּצֵא יִצְחָק לָשׂוּחַ בַּשָּׂדֶה לִפְנוֹת עָרֶב וַיִּשָּׂא עֵינָיו וַיַּרְא וְהִנֵּה גְמַלִּים בָּאִים׃ 64 וַתִּשָּׂא רִבְקָה אֶת־עֵינֶיהָ וַתֵּרֶא אֶת־יִצְחָק וַתִּפֹּל מֵעַל הַגָּמָל׃ 65 וַתֹּאמֶר אֶל־הָעֶבֶד מִי־הָאִישׁ הַלָּזֶה הַהֹלֵךְ בַּשָּׂדֶה לִקְרָאתֵנוּ וַיֹּאמֶר הָעֶבֶד הוּא אֲדֹנִי וַתִּקַּח הַצָּעִיף וַתִּתְכָּס׃

NJPS in the region of the Negeb. 63And Isaac went out walking in the field toward evening and, looking up, he saw camels approaching. 64Raising her eyes, Rebekah saw Isaac. She alighted from the camel 65and said to the servant, "Who is that man walking in the field toward us?" And the servant said, "That is my master." So she took her veil and covered herself.

OJPS South. 63And Isaac went out to meditate in the field at the eventide; and he lifted up his eyes, and saw, and, behold, there were camels coming. 64And Rebekah lifted up her eyes, and when she saw Isaac, she alighted from the camel. 65And she said unto the servant: "What man is this that walketh in the field to meet us?" And the servant said: "It is my master." And she took her veil, and covered herself.

RASHI region of the Negeb and settled between Kadesh and Shur" (20:1), and that Beer-lahai-roi was "between Kadesh and Bered" (16:14). **[G]**

63 Walking. Rather, he went out "to meditate" (OJPS), that is, to pray. The same root is used in "a prayer of the lowly man when he is faint and pours forth his *plea* before the LORD" (Ps. 102:1).

64 Rebekah saw Isaac. She was amazed at how distinguished he looked. **She alighted from the camel.** The Hebrew literally says that she "fell," but Onkelos explains that she lowered herself toward the ground, that is, she slipped down.

[G] See Kimhi's comment to 16:14.

KIMHI **63 And Isaac went out.** From the town where he had spent the night, he walked off, coincidentally, on the same road where Rebekah was traveling. **Walking in the field.** In the countryside, walking through the bushes. **Toward evening.** When it is cool enough to travel. **Looking up, he saw camels approaching.** He was walking through the countryside when he saw camels approaching. So he came out onto the road to see whether this might be his father's servant. This was when Rebekah asked who he was.

64 She alighted from the camel. When the servant told her that it was Isaac, she got off the camel, extracted her wrap, veiled herself, and then got back on the camel. Again the Torah is teaching us in this story proper behavior. A woman should hide herself from her fiancé and not make herself visible to him until she is married to him.

NAHMANIDES Beer-lahai-roi is the same as Beer-sheba. If this is so, it is where Abraham "planted a tamarisk . . . and invoked the name of the LORD" (21:33), certainly a worthy place for prayer.

63 Isaac went out walking in the field toward evening. He was staying somewhere, on the way home from Beer-lahai-roi, and went out into the countryside to talk (not "to walk" of NJPS or "to meditate" of OJPS) with his local friends. He encountered Rebekah and the servant there, and they all traveled together to Isaac's own town, where he brought Rebekah "into the tent of his mother Sarah" (v. 67).

64 Rebekah saw Isaac. See Rashi's comment. In my view, when she saw him approaching them she thought it was someone who wanted to greet them or offer them a place to stay for the night. See my comment to v. 65. **She alighted from the camel.** Onkelos does not mean what Rashi thinks. He means that Rebekah, "from atop the camel" (as the Hebrew literally says), turned her face away from Isaac. Or perhaps he means "from [her position] atop the camel."

65 And said to the servant. Ibn Ezra thinks the verb is pluperfect: "she *had* [already] said to the servant." He thinks there are many such pluperfects in the Torah—and indeed there are some. But this is not one; to make Ibn Ezra's explanation work, you could not just switch the verses, you would have to weave them together. What happened was this: Rebekah saw someone coming and acted appropriately. She then asked the servant who it was.

RASHBAM **63 Isaac went out walking in the field.** Having just come back that day, he did not know what his workers had been doing, which was planting gardens and groves. But he was not "walking" or "meditating"; he went out "to shrub" in the field. Compare "when no *shrub* of the field was yet on earth" (2:5). He went out to plant trees and to see what his workers had been doing. While he was there, **he saw camels approaching.** He went toward them to see whether they were his father's camels, which the servant had taken.

64 She alighted from the camel. For modesty's sake. She had not been riding sidesaddle but like a man, with a leg on each side. As explained on B. Pes. 3a, riding camels is scary, so even women ride them with a leg on each side.

65 Who is that man walking in the field toward us? There is some confusion in this verse. Did she ask who every man was that they met? Moreover, why would she add that he was going along (as the Hebrew really says) "in the field"? It would seem that what is really meant here is, "Who is that man who was walking in the field and turned aside to come toward us?" **[C]** (For "that"—the far demonstrative—compare "Here comes *that* dreamer!" of 37:19; contrast the near demonstrative in "*this* evil Haman" of Esther 7:6.)

[C] Rashbam's comment up to this point did not appear in the manuscript of his commentary, but is attributed to him in other sources.

IBN EZRA **63 Isaac went out walking.** "Bushwhacking," walking among the bushes. **Toward evening.** Close to sunset. Compare the opposite expression, "toward morning." See my comment to Deut. 23:12, where I will explain it "most distinctly" (Deut. 27:8).

64 She alighted from the camel. Literally, she "fell," but deliberately, as when one "falls on one's face."

65 And said to the servant. Rather, "she *had* said to the servant." This is what led her to alight from the camel.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **63 Isaac went out.** He went "out" from Eden, where he had spent the three years since the Binding (Hizkuni). **Walking in the field.** The Hebrew verb is unique, occurring only here (Masorah). Rather, "talking" with someone who needed to speak with him (Hizkuni). He was indeed praying; Abraham prayed at dawn and Isaac at sunset, both at times when the sun was moving, demonstrating that there must therefore be a Prime Mover. See the extensive discussion by Gersonides, in #13 on his list of the "benefits" to be found in this section of the parashah (Abarbanel). He wanted to pour out his heart before the Holy One, so he turned off the road and went into the field so as not to be interrupted (Sforno). **Toward evening.** We can deduce from this that it was summer, when people leave their homes in the evening (in the words of Song 6:11) to chat and "to see the budding of the vale" (Abarbanel). **He saw camels approaching.** The road from Haran to Abraham's home ran from east to west; Isaac had been traveling south, so when he turned off toward the east the camels were facing him, and Rebekah thought he was coming toward them (Sforno).

65 Who is that man? The unusual word for "that" occurs also only in 37:19 (Masorah).

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NJPS 66The servant told Isaac all the things that he had done. 67Isaac then brought her into the tent of his mother Sarah, and he took Rebekah as his wife. Isaac loved her, and thus found comfort after his mother's death.

25 Abraham took another wife, whose

66 וַיְסַפֵּר הָעֶבֶד לְיִצְחָק אֵת כָּל־הַדְּבָרִים
אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה: 67 וַיְבִאֶהָ יִצְחָק הָאֹהֱלָה
שָׂרָה אִמּוֹ וַיִּקַּח אֶת־רִבְקָה וַתְּהִי־לוֹ
לְאִשָּׁה וַיֶּאֱהָבֶהָ וַיִּנָּחֵם יִצְחָק אַחֲרֵי
אִמּוֹ: פ

ששי

כה וַיֹּסֶף אַבְרָהָם וַיִּקַּח אִשָּׁה

OJPS 66And the servant told Isaac all the things that he had done. 67And Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent, and took Rebekah, and she became his wife; and he loved her. And Isaac was comforted for his mother.

25 And Abraham took another wife,

RASHI **66 The servant told Isaac all the things that he had done.** He told him all the miracles that had been done for him: that the earth had folded up for him and that Rebekah had literally been the answer to his prayer.

67 Into the tent of his mother Sarah. The unusual Hebrew phrase here must be read to say, "into the tent *as* his mother Sarah" (see Genesis Rabbah). As long as Sarah was alive, there was a light burning from one Sabbath eve to the next, there was blessing in the dough, and there was a cloud wrapped around the top of the tent. Once she died, all this ceased; but when Rebekah arrived, they returned. **And thus found comfort after his mother's death.** It is natural that while a man's mother is alive he is very wrapped up in her, and that when she dies he finds comfort in his wife's company.

25:1 Keturah. This was Hagar, so nicknamed because all her deeds were as fragrant as incense (*ketorah*), and because she had kept her "entrance" closed (*keshurah*)—she had not coupled with any other man since she had parted from Abraham.

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why does Abraham take "another wife" (v. 1) in extreme old age? Is he jealous, seeing Isaac with Rebekah?

RASHBAM **66 The servant told Isaac all the things that he had done.** To let him know what miracles had been done for him, so he would understand that she was his destined wife.

25:1 Keturah. According to a straightforward reading of the text, this is not Hagar.

IBN EZRA **67 Into the tent of his mother Sarah.** Hebrew syntax ordinarily calls for repeating "the tent" in both parts of this phrase, but the double usage of a single word is not uncommon in Biblical Hebrew; compare the similar syntax in "the prophecy of Oded the prophet" (2 Chron. 15:8).

25:1 Keturah. This is not Hagar; v. 6 refers to multiple "concubines."

KIMHI **66 The servant told Isaac all the things that he had done.** He told him all this on the trip back. They might have reached Hebron that same evening, or perhaps the next day.

67 Isaac then brought her into the tent of his mother Sarah. When they got to Hebron. Sarah's tent would now be Rebekah's. The custom in those days was for the man and the woman to have separate tents. When they were sleeping together, the man would go to the woman's tent. As Leah said to Jacob, "You are to come to me" (30:16), that is, "to my tent." Similarly, when Laban was searching for his gods, he "went into Jacob's tent and Leah's tent and the tents of the two maidservants; but he did not find them. Leaving Leah's tent, he entered Rachel's tent" (31:33). **He took Rebekah as his wife.** More precisely, "he took Rebekah in marriage" as people do, with a wedding ceremony and a festive meal, after which "she became his wife" (OJPS). **Isaac loved her.** Seeing that she was good and modest like his mother, he loved her very much. Since most men love their wives, if the Torah specifically mentions that Isaac loved Rebekah it must mean that he loved her very much, for her good qualities. **And thus found comfort after his mother's death.** He had been mourning for her all this time, though he did not marry Rebekah until three years after Sarah's death. Now, finding that Rebekah was a good woman like his mother, he was comforted.

25:1 Abraham took another wife. Still another. Having already had two, he now took a third wife to take care of him in his old age. And he wished to have more children to increase the number of his offspring in the world. Since his special son, Isaac, was descended from a woman of his own family and had himself married a woman from the family, Abraham did not care what family or even what nation his own new wife came from, as long as she was not a Canaanite. She was certainly a proper wife and not one who would embitter

NAHMANIDES **67 Isaac then brought her into the tent of his mother Sarah.** **[H]** The verse is telling us of the great respect Isaac paid to his mother. Ever since she had died, they had not pitched her tent, saying, "Let no other woman enter the tent of this great woman." But when he saw Rebekah, he brought her into that tent out of respect for her, and there he took her as his wife. **Isaac loved her, and thus found comfort after his mother's death.** Apparently he had been greatly upset by his mother's death and no one was able to comfort him until now. Why else would the text tell us that a man loved his wife? Onkelos and Genesis Rabbah both insist that Rebekah was fully Sarah's equal in righteousness. **[I]**

25:1 Abraham took another wife, whose name was Keturah. So Abraham took a Canaanite wife. Even if you think she was Egyptian or Philistine, he certainly did not send back to his homeland for her as he did with Isaac. For the only offspring about whom this mattered were Isaac's, with whom the covenant would continue. Notice that it does not say "Keturah daughter of So-and-So, from the land of Such-and-Such" as it does with Esau's wives **[J]** and some others. But Keturah was a Canaanite, and there was no point in describing her background; this is a common phenomenon. See further my comment to v. 6.

[H] He repeats Ibn Ezra's point briefly. **[I]** See Rashi's first comment. **[J]** See 26:34, 28:9, and 36:2.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **67 Isaac loved her.** The Hebrew verb form "he loved her" (OJPS) occurs also only in 2 Sam. 13:1 (Masorah).

25:1 Abraham took another wife, whose name was Keturah. It is extremely strange that Abraham would take another wife and have six children with her at his advanced age. No doubt that is what led the Sages to conclude this was Hagar, which would make it a little less strange. But I presume it was the Holy One who prompted him to do this, so that he could fulfill the promise He made in 17:6, "I will make nations of you." And it would stop Ishmael from being so proud of being Abraham's son and from thinking he could split the

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NJPS name was Keturah. [2]She bore him Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak, and Shuah. [3]Jokshan begot Sheba and Dedan. The descendants of Dedan were the Asshurim, the Letushim, and the Leummim. [4]The descendants of Midian were Ephah, Epher, Enoch, Abida, and Eldaah. All these were descendants of Keturah. [5]Abraham willed all that he owned to Isaac; [6]but to Abraham's sons by concubines Abraham gave gifts while he was still living, and he sent them away from his son Isaac eastward, to the land of the East.

וּשְׁמָהּ קְטוּרָה׃ 2 וַתֵּלֶד לוֹ אֶת־זִמְרָן וְאֶת־
יָקְשָׁן וְאֶת־מְדָן וְאֶת־מִדְיָן וְאֶת־יִשְׁבָּק
וְאֶת־שׁוּחַ׃ 3 וְיָקְשָׁן יָלַד אֶת־שְׁבָא וְאֶת־
דְּדָן וּבְנֵי דְדָן הָיוּ אַשּׁוּרִם וּלְטוּשִׁים
וּלְאֻמִּים׃ 4 וּבְנֵי מִדְיָן עֵיפָה וָעֵפֶר וַחֲנֹךְ
וַאֲבִידָע וְאֶלְדָּעָה כָּל־אֵלֶּה בְּנֵי קְטוּרָה׃
5 וַיִּתֵּן אַבְרָהָם אֶת־כָּל־אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ לְיִצְחָק׃
6 וְלִבְנֵי הַפִּילַגְשִׁים אֲשֶׁר לְאַבְרָהָם נָתַן
אַבְרָהָם מַתָּנֹת וַיְשַׁלְּחֵם מֵעַל יִצְחָק בְּנוֹ
בְּעוֹדֶנּוּ חַי קֵדְמָה אֶל־אֶרֶץ קֶדֶם׃

OJPS and her name was Keturah. [2]And she bore him Zimran, and Jokshan, and Medan, and Midian, and Ishbak, and Shuah. [3]And Jokshan begot Sheba, and Dedan. And the sons of Dedan were Asshurim, and Letushim, and Leummim. [4]And the sons of Midian: Ephah, and Epher, and Hanoch, and Abida, and Eldaah. All these were the children of Keturah. [5]And Abraham gave all that he had unto Isaac. [6]But unto the sons of the concubines, that Abraham had, Abraham gave gifts; and he sent them away from Isaac his son, while he yet lived, eastward, unto the east country.

RASHI **3 The Asshurim, the Letushim.** "The" is not in the Hebrew; these are not the names of groups, as Onkelos and NJPS think, but of individuals who founded peoples. The meanings Onkelos assigns to the names are legitimate, **[H]** but I cannot reconcile his rendering with the absence of the definite article.

5 Abraham willed all that he owned to Isaac. Literally, he "gave" it (OJPS), just as he "gives" in v. 6, but indeed, R. Nehemiah says: The blessing was a legacy that Abraham willed to Isaac. The Holy One told Abraham, "'You shall be a blessing' [12:2], and the blessings are yours, to bless with them whomever you like." Abraham passed them on to Isaac.

6 Concubines. The Hebrew word is spelled without the י of the plural, for there was only one concubine: Hagar (that is, Keturah). **[I]** The distinction between a wife and a concubine, as we read with regard to David's wives and concubines on B. Sanh. 21a, is

[H] See Nahmanides' comment. **[I]** In our texts, the י is present.

RASHBAM **6 Concubines.** Hagar and Keturah. **Gifts.** A great deal of money. **Eastward, to the land of the East.** For his sons to inherit the lands that he possessed there.

IBN EZRA **3 The Asshurim.** Some take this word to mean "those who know the way" (compare Job 31:7). **The Letushim.** The "far-seers" (compare Job 16:9). But to me these are simply meaningless names.

6 Concubines. This is simply another word for female slaves. (Ezek. 23:20 is not an exception.) **Gifts.** He gave them money. **Eastward,** that is, **to the land of the East.** East of Israel. Some think it is a name; he sent them to (Ishmael's son) Kedmah (see v. 15). But in fact the translations are correct.

KIMHI his old age. Hagar, of course, was Abraham's legitimate wife (see OJPS, not NJPS, to 16:3)—she was Egyptian, not Canaanite—and so was Keturah, as we are told here. But he had children by concubines as well, though only the children of the wives are mentioned in the text. The wives had wedding ceremonies and celebrations; the relationships with the concubines were legalized via intercourse alone.

2 She bore him Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak, and Shuah. For some of these sons, their own sons are mentioned; for Jokshan, even the sons of his son Dedan. For some of them, no sons are mentioned at all, which could mean that they did not have any or that they had them but they died.

3 The Asshurim, the Letushim, and the Leummim. The Hebrew does not say "the" (see OJPS). We do not know why he gave these sons plural-sounding names; presumably he had some reason for it. Mizraim in 10:13 did the same thing.

4 All these were descendants of Keturah. Sixteen all told, counting the "sons" of every generation. But why stop there? Why not list all her descendants? Most likely, all these were born during Abraham's lifetime. If he married Keturah when Isaac married Rebekah, he still had 35 years of his life left, and he might well have seen grandchildren from Keturah.

6 To Abraham's sons by concubines. More precisely, "the sons of the concubines that Abraham had" in his household (see OJPS). These were not the sons of his own concubines but the sons of his servants' concubines. Nonetheless, they had grown up in his

NAHMANIDES **3 The descendants of Dedan were the Asshurim, the Letushim, and the Leummim.** See Rashi's comment. It seems to me that Onkelos here is taking *asshurim* as a common noun meaning "caravans," related to the Hebrew of "I have followed in His *tracks*" (Job 23:11) and "his *feet* do not slip" (Ps. 37:31). He took *letushim* to mean "tent dwellers," relating it to *natash*, "to be scattered over the earth," here today and gone tomorrow. (The consonants *l* and *n* regularly alternate; see, e.g., Neh. 12:44 and 13:7, where *lishkah* becomes *nishkah*.) As for *leummim*, he must have connected it with *iyyim* ("coastlands"). It must have been "were" that prompted Onkelos's explanation, since in the other verse with plural-sounding names, we read that "Mizraim *begot* the Ludim, the Anamim" and so forth (10:13). But R. Samuel b. R. Nahman points out in Genesis Rabbah that, despite the interpretive translations of the Targumim, these are just people's names. And that is how it is.

6 To Abraham's sons by concubines. The straightforward sense of this expression is that, once we are told that "it is through Isaac that offspring shall be continued for you" (21:12), all of Abraham's other wives are the moral equivalent of concubines and not full wives, since their sons would not be his heirs. Hagar might be considered a concubine in any case since she was Sarah's maidservant, but we are

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS inheritance with Isaac. Now he would be just another son. Keturah was no doubt a Canaanite (or a Philistine or an Egyptian), but that did not matter. Isaac's mother, and Isaac's wife, through whom the covenant would be carried on, were from Abraham's own family and his country, and that was all that mattered. This second wife was just for himself (Abarbanel).

2 She bore him Zimran. She bore these children "for" him to let her raise them in his household. He did not beget them; 1 Chron. 1:28 makes clear that he begat no sons but Isaac and Ishmael (Sforno).

5 Abraham willed all that he owned to Isaac. Once he saw that none of the other boys was advancing toward perfection (Gersonides).

6 He sent them away from his son Isaac eastward, to the land of the East. Aram, where they would be able to inherit his portion of his father's household (Bekhor Shor). So that their bad behavior would not prevent Isaac from reaching perfection (Gersonides).

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NJPS 7This was the total span of Abraham's life: one hundred and seventy-five years. 8And Abraham breathed his last, dying at a good ripe age, old and contented; and he was gathered to his kin. 9His sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of

OJPS 7And these are the days of the years of Abraham's life which he lived, a hundred threescore and fifteen years. 8And Abraham expired, and died in a good old age, an old man, and full of years; and was gathered to his people. 9And Isaac and Ishmael his sons buried him in the cave of

7 וְאֵלֶּה יְמֵי שְׁנֵי־חַיֵּי אַבְרָהָם אֲשֶׁר־חָי
מְאַת שָׁנָה וְשִׁבְעִים שָׁנָה וְחָמֵשׁ שָׁנִים׃
8 וַיִּגְוַע וַיָּמָת אַבְרָהָם בְּשֵׂיבָה טוֹבָה זָקֵן
וְשָׂבֵעַ וַיֵּאָסֶף אֶל־עַמָּיו׃ 9 וַיִּקְבְּרוּ אֹתוֹ
יִצְחָק וְיִשְׁמָעֵאל בָּנָיו אֶל־מְעָרַת

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ What precisely is meant by the three verbs that describe Abraham's death: he "breathed his last," he "died" (OJPS), and he "was gathered to his kin" (v. 8)? Wouldn't just one or two of these have been enough?

RASHI that a wife has a marriage contract; a concubine does not. **Abraham gave gifts.** He had already given "all" to Isaac; according to the Sages, what he gave to the concubines' sons was the secrets of black magic. Another reading: **[J]** Everything that was given him on Sarah's account, **[K]** as well as anything else he was given as a gift. He gave these all away, having no wish to profit from them.

7 One hundred and seventy-five years. Literally, "one hundred years and seventy years and five years"—equally sinless at age 100, age 70, and age 5.

9 Isaac and Ishmael. Ishmael not only repented, he let Isaac take precedence. That is the "good old age" Abraham was promised in 15:15.

[J] It is not certain that this reading is Rashi's. **[K]** See 12:16 and 20:14.

RASHBAM **8 At a good ripe age.** As the Holy One had told him: "You shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried at a ripe old age" (15:15). The oppression of 15:13 would not occur during his own lifetime.

IBN EZRA **8 Breathed his last.** The spirit leaves the body in a single moment, with no pain and no hindrance. Compare Jacob in 49:33, drawing his feet into the bed and immediately "breathing his last." This Hebrew verb always refers to death, but not everyone who dies is described as "breathing his last." So 7:21 must tell us specifically that everyone who died in the Flood died in this way. **Dying at a good ripe age.** We have already been told that he died; this phrase is included for the sake of the phrase "at a good ripe age." **He was gathered to his kin.** Some say that this refers to the soul being gathered to its kin, since it is really something separate from the body. When it parts from the body at last, it can be "gathered" once more "to its kin." Others think this is simply an idiom meaning that the person has "gone the way of his kin"—literally, as the Hebrew says, "of his fathers"—as if he were now rejoining them. Indeed, Abraham was told, "You shall go to your fathers in peace" (15:15).

KIMHI household, were circumcised, and followed his ways. **Abraham gave gifts.** As was appropriate. So obviously he gave gifts of this kind to his own sons, Ishmael and the sons of Keturah, even though that is not mentioned. **While he was still living.** So that there would be no dispute over the inheritance after his death. **He sent them away from his son Isaac.** So that they would not quarrel with him or be a burden to him. **Eastward, to the land of the East.** After saying in which *direction* he sent them, the text then tells us which *land* he sent them to: the land of the East—Haran and Ur. He knew that his family would take them in.

8 Abraham breathed his last. Rather, he "expired, and died" (OJPS), that is, he died an easy, quick death, not after a long illness. **At a good ripe age.** Having lived well, earned respect, and lived long enough to see his grandchildren. **He was gathered to his kin.** Those who had died before him. This is the customary biblical idiom, no matter whether the person's ancestors were righteous or wicked.

9 His sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him. For they were older and of higher rank

NAHMANIDES forced to understand the word this way because v. 1 explicitly calls Keturah Abraham's "wife." If she had been a maidservant in his household whom he took as a concubine, the text would not call her a wife. So it must be as I have explained. And indeed when 1 Chron. 1:31 enumerates Keturah's sons, it calls her "Abraham's concubine." But perhaps she had been a maidservant in his household, of slave descent. That would be enough to explain why Chronicles calls her a concubine, and why no background information about her is given. With slaves, the text normally gives only their names, as it did with Zilpah and Bilhah. **[K]** Rashi's comment is not correct; B. Sanh. 21a refers to "a marriage contract and a betrothal ceremony." Moreover, the marriage contract for Jews is merely a rabbinic enactment, and it is quite possible that non-Jews sometimes used them as well. But a woman who was willing to be a concubine and not have her children inherit anything from their father would not have any contract. And if the Sages are correct that Keturah was Hagar, then she was certainly a concubine.

8 Old and contented. He had gotten everything he asked for, and all his wants were completely satisfied. The fuller phrase is to be "contented with days," as is Isaac in 35:29. He was not waiting for the coming days to bring him anything he did not already have. 1 Chron. 29:28 says something similar of David. That is the story of God's kindness to the righteous: "You have granted him the desire of his heart" (Ps. 21:3). Whatever they do not need, they do not desire. It is not so with others: "A lover of money never has his fill of money" (Eccles. 5:9). It is of this latter kind of person that the Sages said, "No one leaves this world with half his desires fulfilled. If he had 100 minas, he wants 200. When he gets the 200, he wants to turn them into 400." In Genesis Rabbah, the Sages were moved to tell us that the Holy One shows the righteous the rewards that await them in the World to Come, which satisfies their desires; then they simply fall asleep.

9 His sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him. As Genesis Rabbah explains the order of their names, the older man, who was the son of

[K] See 30:1–13.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **8 Old and contented.** He had seen everything he wanted to see and done everything he wanted to do (Sforno). **And he was gathered to his kin.** That is, his soul remained in existence and was gathered to those of his ancestors who were good and therefore also remained in existence in some way. But the phrase may also mean that he was gathered to those intellectual concepts that he had attained during his life. One who accustoms himself to cling to material things cannot be gathered to the intellectual concepts that are his true kin. All this is explained in book 1 of my *Wars of the Lord* (Gersonides). I think it is the physical body that "breathes its last," the soul that is "gathered to its kin," and the combination of the two that "dies." All three terms are used of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Aaron. But Moses does not "breathe his last," since, as we know from Deut. 34:7, there was no physical reason for his death; "his eyes were undimmed and his vigor unabated." He died by the will of his Creator (Abarbanel). He was "bound up in the bundle of [eternal] life" (1 Sam. 25:29) with others of his ilk, the righteous of all generations (Sforno).

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הַמַּכְפֵּלָה אֶל־שְׂדֵה עֶפְרֹן בֶּן־צֹחַר הַחִתִּי
אֲשֶׁר עַל־פְּנֵי מַמְרֵא׃ 10 הַשָּׂדֶה אֲשֶׁר־קָנָה
אַבְרָהָם מֵאֵת בְּנֵי־חֵת שָׁמָּה קֻבַּר
אַבְרָהָם וְשָׂרָה אִשְׁתּוֹ׃ 11 וַיְהִי אַחֲרֵי מוֹת
אַבְרָהָם וַיְבָרֶךְ אֱלֹהִים אֶת־יִצְחָק בְּנוֹ
וַיֵּשֶׁב יִצְחָק עִם־בְּאֵר לַחַי רֹאִי׃ ס
12 וְאֵלֶּה תֹּלְדֹת יִשְׁמָעֵאל בֶּן־אַבְרָהָם
אֲשֶׁר יָלְדָה הָגָר הַמִּצְרִית שִׁפְחַת שָׂרָה
לְאַבְרָהָם׃ 13 וְאֵלֶּה שְׁמוֹת בְּנֵי יִשְׁמָעֵאל
בִּשְׁמֹתָם לְתוֹלְדֹתָם בְּכֹר יִשְׁמָעֵאל נְבָיֹת
וְקֵדָר וְאַדְבְּאֵל וּמִבְשָׂם׃ 14 וּמִשְׁמָע וְדוּמָה
וּמַשָּׂא׃ 15 חֲדַד וְתֵימָא יְטוּר נָפִישׁ
וָקֶדְמָה׃ 16 אֵלֶּה הֵם בְּנֵי יִשְׁמָעֵאל וְאֵלֶּה
שְׁמוֹתָם בְּחַצְרֵיהֶם וּבְטִירֹתָם שְׁנֵים־עָשָׂר
נְשִׂיאִם לְאֻמֹּתָם׃ 17 וְאֵלֶּה שְׁנֵי חַיֵּי
יִשְׁמָעֵאל מְאַת שָׁנָה וּשְׁלֹשִׁים שָׁנָה וְשֶׁבַע

NJPS Machpelah, in the field of Ephron son of Zohar the Hittite, facing Mamre, [10]the field that Abraham had bought from the Hittites; there Abraham was buried, and Sarah his wife. [11]After the death of Abraham, God blessed his son Isaac. And Isaac settled near Beer-lahai-roi.

[12]This is the line of Ishmael, Abraham's son, whom Hagar the Egyptian, Sarah's slave, bore to Abraham. [13]These are the names of the sons of Ishmael, by their names, in the order of their birth: Nebaioth, the first-born of Ishmael, Kedar, Adbeel, Mibsam, [14]Mishma, Dumah, Massa, [15]Hadad, Tema, Jetur, Naphish, and Kedmah. [16]These are the sons of Ishmael and these are their names by their villages and by their encampments: twelve chieftains of as many tribes.—[17]These were the years of the life of Ishmael: one hundred and thirty-seven years; then he breathed

OJPS Machpelah, in the field of Ephron the son of Zohar the Hittite, which is before Mamre; [10]the field which Abraham purchased of the children of Heth; there was Abraham buried, and Sarah his wife. [11]And it came to pass after the death of Abraham, that God blessed Isaac his son; and Isaac dwelt by Beer-lahai-roi.

[12]Now these are the generations of Ishmael, Abraham's son, whom Hagar the Egyptian, Sarah's handmaid, bore unto Abraham. [13]And these are the names of the sons of Ishmael, by their names, according to their generations: the first-born of Ishmael, Nebaioth; and Kedar, and Adbeel, and Mibsam, [14]and Mishma, and Dumah, and Massa; [15]Hadad, and Tema, Jetur, Naphish, and Kedem; [16]these are the sons of Ishmael, and these are their names, by their villages, and by their encampments; twelve princes according to their nations. [17]And these are the years of the life of Ishmael, a hundred and thirty and seven

RASHI **11 After the death of Abraham, God blessed his son Isaac.** He comforted him, as one does a mourner. Another reading: Even though the Holy One had given Abraham the blessings, Abraham was afraid to pass them on to Isaac because he foresaw that Esau would descend from him. But he decided, "Let the Master of blessing come and bless whomever he thinks fit." The Holy One came and blessed Isaac.

13 In the order of their birth. OJPS translates literally, NJPS idiomatically.

16 Their villages. The Hebrew word refers to towns without walls, which is why Onkelos translates here with a word meaning "wide open."

17 These were the years of the life of Ishmael: one hundred and thirty-seven years. Said R. Hiyya b. Abba: Why is Ishmael's age given here? So that we can correlate Jacob's age. From Ishmael's age we learn that Jacob served for 14 years in the academy of

RASHBAM **12 Abraham's son, whom Hagar the Egyptian, Sarah's slave, bore to Abraham.** That is, he was not a son in the sense of being an heir; he was the son of a slave. Contrast "This is the story of Isaac, son of Abraham. Abraham begot Isaac" (25:19). It was Isaac who was "the generation" of Abraham (compare OJPS to that verse). Compare "This is the line of Perez: Perez begot Hezron" (Ruth 4:18) and so forth, where "the line" (in Hebrew, the same as "the generation" of 25:19) is the line that will lead to David.

17 These were the years of the life of Ishmael. The Sages explain on B. Meg. 17a why Ishmael's age is listed here. **[D]** But the straightforward reason for it is out of respect for Abraham. Since Abraham's age at his birth is given ("Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore Ishmael" [16:16]), and his own age at circumcision is also given ("Ishmael was thirteen years old when he was circumcised" [17:25]), his age at his death is also given here.

[D] See Rashi's comment.

KIMHI than the others, and he especially loved them. That is why they took care of his burial, even though Keturah's sons were presumably also there. Or perhaps Abraham sent them away as he had the sons of the concubines. **In the cave of Machpelah, in the field of Ephron.** In the cave, which was in the field.

10 The field that Abraham had bought. Whenever this burial site is mentioned, the purchase is also mentioned. Abraham had no place to bury his dead until he bought one himself, and yet he was so loyal that he never doubted the God who had told him, "I give all the land that you see to you and your offspring forever" (13:15).

11 God blessed his son Isaac. With success, as He had blessed Isaac's father.

12 This is the line of Ishmael, Abraham's son. His line is mentioned here because he was Abraham's first-born. God therefore blessed him with success as well, as we are told in 21:20.

16 These are the sons of Ishmael. A summary statement after the details have been given, to keep things clear. **These are their names.** So that any time someone hears one of these names, he will know that he is dealing with a person or a nation descended from Ishmael. **By their villages and by their encampments.** In their own lands they had great wealth and honor, living in both unwalled towns and fortified cities. **Twelve chieftains of as many tribes.** As God had promised Abraham in 17:20. Each of the 12 had a tribe named after him, e.g., Jetur and Naphish, whom we find numbered among "the Hagrites" of 1 Chron. 5:19. And Kedar, Dumah, Massa, and Tema are all individually mentioned as nations in the prophetic books.

IBN EZRA **16 Their encampments.** Rather, "their castles": "If she be a wall, we will build upon it a silver *battlement*" (Song 8:9). **Of as many tribes.** The ל of the Hebrew word is a preposition here; but when it is a root letter this word still has the same meaning: "One *people* shall be mightier than the other" (25:23).

NAHMANIDES the maidservant, gave the place of honor to the younger man, who was the son of the wife.

11 Isaac settled near Beer-lahai-roi. "Near" it or, since it was not a city, perhaps he pitched his tent "next to" it.

17 These were the years of the life of Ishmael. The most plausible explanation for this being here is that the text gives us this kind of information to demonstrate that the offspring of the righteous are blessed. The years of the life of Esau are not given, however, since he

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **10 There Abraham was buried, and Sarah his wife.** The Hebrew has the phrase "Abraham and Sarah," which occurs nowhere else except 18:11, where it is "Now Abraham and Sarah" (Masorah).

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NJPS his last and died, and was gathered to his kin.—[18]They dwelt from Havilah, by Shur, which is close to Egypt, all the way to Asshur; they camped alongside all their kinsmen.

שָׁנִים וַיִּגְוַע וַיָּמָת וַיֵּאָסֶף אֶל־עַמָּיו׃
18 וַיִּשְׁכְּנוּ מֵחֲוִילָה עַד־שׁוּר אֲשֶׁר עַל־פְּנֵי
מִצְרַיִם בֹּאֲכָה אַשּׁוּרָה עַל־פְּנֵי כָל־אֶחָיו
נָפָל׃ פ

OJPS years; and he expired and died; and was gathered unto his people. [18]And they dwelt from Havilah unto Shur that is before Egypt, as thou goest toward Asshur: over against all his brethren he did settle.

RASHI Eber in between leaving his father and coming to Laban. For Jacob left his father when Esau married "Mahalath the daughter of Ishmael son of Abraham, sister of Nebaioth" (28:9), and (as explained on B. Meg. 17a) that is when Ishmael died and Mahalath needed to be identified no longer as his daughter but as "sister of Nebaioth." **Then he breathed his last**. This particular verb is used only for the death of the righteous.

18 They camped alongside all their kinsmen. The Hebrew verb commonly means "fall," but here it means "dwell," as in "Midian, Amalek, and all the Kedemites *were spread* over the plain, as thick as locusts" (Judg. 7:12). Compare the parallel phrase to ours: "He shall *dwell* alongside of all his kinsmen" (16:12). Nonetheless, the change in verbs is significant. While Abraham was still alive Ishmael would "dwell"; after Abraham's death, he "fell."

KIMHI **18 They dwelt**. Ishmael's sons. **They camped alongside all their kinsmen**. See my comment to "He shall dwell alongside of all his kinsmen" (16:12).

RASHBAM **18 They camped alongside all their kinsmen**. Replacing the verb in "He shall dwell alongside of all his kinsmen" (16:12) with a synonym.

IBN EZRA **18 They camped**. Rather, "it fell"—their portion, their lot. Or it may mean that most of the Ishmaelites moved from place to place; that is how the verb is used in "You are *defecting* to the Chaldeans" (Jer. 37:13). But this is somewhat implausible, given that his brothers were in the east, while "Egypt" and "Asshur" are west of Israel. But the verse may be saying that Ishmael died during his brothers' lifetime, as the result of a fall. After all, we do not know what caused his death. **Their kinsmen**. Zimran and Jokshan of v. 2.

NAHMANIDES lived longer than Jacob and the story ended with Jacob's death; the text did not wish to return to Esau at that point, having already described his descendants in the appropriate place. **[L]** There are a great many midrashim explaining why Ishmael is listed here, the most correct of which is that he indeed repented and became a righteous man. **He breathed his last**. Ishmael was therefore entitled to have this verb used of him. Rashi says it can *only* be used of the righteous, but the Talmud points out that it is also used for those who died in the Flood. It in fact refers to a quick, painless death, ordinarily reserved for the righteous but experienced also by those of the wicked who are "overthrown in a moment" (Lam. 4:6)—the victims of the Flood and those who died in the wilderness (see Num. 20:3). **And died, and was gathered to his kin**. When either of these verbs is added to "breathing one's last," it definitely implies that the person was righteous. With regard to the suddenness of such a death, however, there is a differing opinion in Genesis Rabbah. Originally the righteous suffered from intestinal illness for a few days before they died, which cleansed them; and indeed "mortals languish and die and then breathe their last" (Job 14:10).

[L] See ch. 36.

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TOLEDOT

תולדות

NJPS [19]This is the story of Isaac, son of Abraham. Abraham begot Isaac. [20]Isaac was forty years old when he took to wife Rebekah, daughter of Bethuel the Aramean of Paddan-aram, sister of Laban the

[19] וְאֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדֹת יִצְחָק בֶּן־אַבְרָהָם
אַבְרָהָם הוֹלִיד אֶת־יִצְחָק׃ [20] וַיְהִי יִצְחָק
בֶּן־אַרְבָּעִים שָׁנָה בְּקַחְתּוֹ אֶת־רִבְקָה בַּת־
בְּתוּאֵל הָאֲרַמִּי מִפַּדַּן אֲרָם אֲחוֹת לָבָן

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Once we know that Isaac is the "son of Abraham," isn't it redundant to tell us that "Abraham begot Isaac" (v. 19)? ✦ "Isaac was forty years old when he took to wife Rebekah" (v. 20). Why did he wait to such an advanced age before getting married?

RASHI **19 This is the story of Isaac.** Rather, "these are the generations of Isaac" (OJPS): Jacob and Esau, whose stories are told in this section. **Abraham begot Isaac.** Having called Isaac the "son of Abraham," the text responded to the scoffers of that generation, who claimed that Sarah had gotten pregnant by Abimelech. After all, she had lived with Abraham for many years and not gotten pregnant by him. What did the Holy One do? He fashioned Isaac's countenance to resemble Abraham's. So everyone had to admit there was proof that "Abraham begot Isaac."

20 Isaac was forty years old. Remember that Abraham got the news about the birth of Rebekah when he came back from Mount Moriah; **[A]** Isaac was 37 at the time. For Sarah died at just that time, and we know that Isaac was 37 when Sarah died. She was 90 when Isaac was born and 127 when she died (see 23:1). Isaac waited until Rebekah had reached age 3, old enough for intercourse, and then married her. **Daughter of Bethuel the Aramean of Paddan-aram, sister of Laban the Aramean.** Don't we know all this

[A] See 22:23.

KIMHI **19 This is the story of Isaac.** "The generations of Ishmael" (v. 12, OJPS) and their possessions were recorded in brief; now the Torah comes back to record "the generations of Isaac" (OJPS)—the story of what happened to him and his "generations," Jacob and Esau, and their generations as well, in detail. **Abraham begot Isaac.** The midrash says that Isaac resembled Abraham, so that no one could say (since he had been born when his parents were so old) that he was adopted. It is also correct to explain that he was honest and reliable and followed his father's good ways with people, so that everyone agreed, "Indeed, Abraham begot Isaac."

20 Isaac was forty years old when he took to wife Rebekah. This is to let us know that it was 20 years before Rebekah gave birth. She was barren but eventually gave birth miraculously through God's great goodness to Isaac. The barrenness of the Matriarchs was arranged deliberately by God so that He could demonstrate His love for Abraham and Isaac to everyone by means of these miracles. **Paddan-aram.** In addition to Aram-naharaim and Aram-zobah (which were contiguous), the "pair" of Arams that gave Paddan-aram its

NAHMANIDES **19 This is the story of Isaac, son of Abraham.** More specifically, the "story" is about "the generations of Isaac" (OJPS)—his sons Esau and Jacob, whose birth is about to be described. **Abraham begot Isaac.** See the comments of Rashi and Ibn Ezra. In my view, the text is doing what it customarily does, which is to present important figures by starting with their ultimate ancestor. See Chronicles, for example, where 1 Chron. 1:17 starts describing the various children and grandchildren of Shem. When Abraham is to be introduced, 1 Chron. 1:24 goes back to Shem and proceeds directly from him to Abraham, one generation at a time. Similarly, 1 Chron. 9:39 goes back to Ner (already mentioned three verses before) to introduce his grandson Saul. Here too "Abraham begot Isaac" and Isaac (as will shortly be described) begot Jacob. Since we have just read about "the generations of Ishmael" (v. 12, OJPS), if our verse said nothing but "the generations of Isaac" it would be equating Ishmael and Isaac or even giving the first-born primacy. For a similar reason, there is no phrase in Genesis saying, "these are the generations of Abraham." If there were, it would have to include both Ishmael and the sons of Keturah. So our verse goes back to say that "Abraham begot Isaac," who alone carries on Abraham's "line" (see 21:12). That is also why v. 12, beginning the "line" of Ishmael, identifies him as the son "whom Hagar the Egyptian, Sarah's slave, bore to Abraham." That is, he has nothing to do with the "line" of Abraham. The text is careful to distinguish Isaac from Abraham's other sons, just as it does in 1 Chron. 1:34.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **19 This is the story of Isaac.** The Hebrew word means both "generations" (OJPS) and the "story" of what would happen to them (Abarbanel). **Abraham begot Isaac.** Abram begot Ishmael, but Abraham begot Isaac (Hizkuni). The text is telling us, using an expression common to many languages, that he was his father's son (Gersonides). It is pointing out how much their stories resemble each other (Abarbanel).

20 Isaac was forty years old when he took to wife Rebekah. According to Seder Olam, Rebekah, Kohath, and Ben Azzai all lived for 133 years; this would mean that Rebekah was 14 when Isaac married her (Hizkuni). **Paddan-aram.** Rashi's final comment about the meaning of Paddan is confirmed by Hosea 12:13, "Jacob had to flee to the *field* of Aram" (Hizkuni). **Sister of Laban the Aramean.** Who will figure later in the story of Jacob (Bekhor Shor). She would bear Esau, who so resembled this brother (Sforno).

OJPS [19]And these are the generations of Isaac, Abraham's son: Abraham begot Isaac. [20]And Isaac was forty years old when he took Rebekah, the daughter of Bethuel the Aramean, of Paddan-aram, the sister of

RASHBAM **19 Abraham begot Isaac.** The straightforward reason for this phrase is that we have just read about Abraham's son Ishmael, "whom Hagar . . . bore to Abraham" (v. 12.) That verse—in Hebrew—begins precisely the way ours does (compare OJPS). But "Abraham begot Isaac," his heir, through his legitimate wife, "for it is through Isaac that offspring shall be continued for you" (21:12). Chronicles too states, "the sons of Abraham: Isaac and Ishmael" (1 Chron. 1:28), and then says plainly, "Abraham begot Isaac" (1 Chron. 1:34).

20 Isaac was forty years old. And he "was sixty years old when they were born" (v. 26). In combination, these two verses tell us that she was barren for 20 years.

IBN EZRA **19 This is the story of Isaac.** Having recorded "the generations of Ishmael" (v. 12, OJPS), the Torah comes back to record "the generations of Isaac" (OJPS): Esau and Jacob. **Abraham begot Isaac.** Some say the point of this additional phrase is that Isaac resembled Abraham, so everyone who saw him would agree that Abraham had begot him; others, that the verb really means Abraham raised him (see my comment to 50:23). The fact that Abraham sent his "sons by concubines" away from Isaac (v. 6) testifies in favor of this interpretation.

20 Paddan-aram. "Paddan" is simply a word for "country," as it is in Arabic. **Sister of Laban.** Her brother was better known than their father. The same explanation holds for Aaron's wife being identified as "sister of Nahshon" in Exod. 6:23.

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NJPS Aramean. 21Isaac pleaded with the LORD on behalf of his wife, because she was barren; and the LORD responded to his plea, and his wife Rebekah conceived. 22But the children struggled in her womb, and she said, "If so, why do I exist?" She

הָאֲרַמִּי לְוֹ לְאִשָּׁה׃ 21 וַיֶּעְתַּר יִצְחָק לַיהוָה לְנֹכַח אִשְׁתּוֹ כִּי עֲקָרָה הִוא וַיֵּעָתֶר לוֹ יְהוָה וַתַּהַר רִבְקָה אִשְׁתּוֹ׃ 22 וַיִּתְרֹצֲצוּ הַבָּנִים בְּקִרְבָּהּ וַתֹּאמֶר אִם־כֵּן לָמָּה זֶּה

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ How did Isaac know that "she was barren" (v. 21) and not he himself? ✦ What did Rebekah mean by "if so" (v. 22)?

OJPS Laban the Aramean, to be his wife. 21And Isaac entreated the LORD for his wife, because she was barren; and the LORD let Himself be entreated of him, and Rebekah his wife conceived. 22And the children struggled together within her; and she said: "If it be so, wherefore do I live?"

RASHI already? But here it is written in praise of her: she was the daughter of a wicked man, the sister of a wicked man, and from a place of wicked people—but she did not learn their ways. "Paddan" is the Aramaic word for a yoke (see the Aramaic translation of 1 Sam. 11:7), that is, a pair; there were two Arams, Aram-naharaim and Aram-zobah. "Paddan-aram" refers to the pair of them. Others relate "Paddan" to the Arabic word for "countryside."

21 Isaac pleaded with the LORD. He prayed with great intensity. **On behalf of his wife.** Rather, "opposite his wife," he praying in one corner of the house and she in the opposite corner. **And the LORD responded to his plea.** He was persuaded by Isaac's intensity. The root עתר carries this meaning everywhere in the Bible: "a *thick* cloud of incense smoke ascended" (Ezek. 8:11); "you have *multiplied* your words against Me" (Ezek. 35:13); "the kisses of an enemy are *profuse*" (Prov. 27:6). The Lord was persuaded by Isaac's prayer, not by Rebekah's. There is no comparison between the prayer of a righteous person who is descended from righteous people and the prayer of a righteous person who is descended from wicked people. That is why He responded to his plea, not hers.

22 But the children struggled in her womb, and she said, "If so, why do I exist?" More literally, "But the children *yitrotzetzu* in her womb, and she said, "If so, why do I?"—a verse that cries out for midrashic explication. What is *yitrotzetzu*, and what is Rebekah saying? Our Sages explain: When she passed by the doors of Torah (those of Shem and Eber) Jacob would run (*rutz*), struggling to get out; when she would pass by the entrance to a place of idolatry, Esau would struggle to get out. Another reading: They were struggling (*ratzatz*) with each other, about who would be the heir—in this world, and in the World to Come. "If so," she said, "if my pregnancy is *so* painful and difficult, why do I want it and pray for it so intensely?" **She went.** To the school (*beit midrash*) of Shem. **To inquire of the LORD.** To find out (*lidrosh*) what was going to happen to her.

RASHBAM **21 Isaac pleaded with the LORD.** The Hebrew verb implies that he pleaded at length: "you . . . *multiplied your words* against Me" (Ezek. 35:13). **On behalf of his wife.** The translations are correct.

22 But the children struggled in her womb. Rather, they "ran," as in "*runner* dashes to meet *runner*" (Jer. 51:31). They were fidgeting inside her body, as fetuses do. The *o* vowel shows that the verb is רוץ, not רצץ; our form is Hitpolel, the equivalent for hollow verbs of the standard Hitpael. **[A] She went to inquire of the LORD.** Via the prophets of those days. Remember that Moses said, "It is because the people come to me to inquire of God" (Exod. 18:15); **[B]** "there is one more man through whom we

[A] See Special Topics, "Biblical Hebrew." **[B]** The surviving version of Rashbam's commentary misquotes this as "to inquire of the LORD."

IBN EZRA **21 Isaac pleaded with the LORD.** The verb is Qal. When Pharaoh tells Moses to "plead with the LORD" in Exod. 8:4, the same root is used in Hiphil, which presumes that the Lord would accept their words. **The LORD responded to his plea.** Using the Niphal form of the verb. **[A]** The Lord was persuaded.

22 The children struggled in her womb. The verb is from רוץ, "to run," with doubling of the צ. Compare "they *race* like streaks of lightning" (Nah. 2:5). They are called "children" here because that is what they will eventually be, as in "you strip the naked of their clothing" (Job 22:6; obviously they are not naked until after being stripped). Rebekah asked other women who had given birth whether anything like this had happened to them, and they said no. **And she said, "If so, why do I exist?"** Rather, "if so, why me?" She is asking, "If

[A] See Special Topics, "Biblical Hebrew."

KIMHI name, there were others as well: Aram of Damascus and Aram of Beth-rehob. Paddan-aram includes Ur, Haran, and other towns. **Sister of Laban.** Who was well known and (as we have explained) head of the household.

21 Isaac pleaded with the LORD. He loved her so much he did not want to take another wife, not even one of her maidservants. **On behalf of his wife.** Or perhaps "facing his wife," to keep his thoughts focused on her.

22 But the children struggled in her womb. They were so fidgety that it felt to her as if they were racing each other. **She went to inquire of the LORD.** The tradition that she went to the academy of Shem is plausible; he was certainly still alive, since he lived 31 years after the death of Abraham. But why should we think she would bypass Abraham for Shem? She could still "go" to inquire of him, assuming that he lived in some separate house, perhaps with Keturah and her children.

NAHMANIDES **22 She said, "If so, why do I exist?"** Rashi's explanation—that Rebekah was asking why she had prayed for pregnancy if it was going to be difficult—is not correct. And the phrase says nothing about the conversation that Ibn Ezra describes. I think the translations understand correctly what she meant. "If only I did not exist, if only I could die or never even have been born!" Compare "I should have been as though I never was" (Job 10:19). **She went to inquire of the LORD.** Despite Rashi, I have not found this word "inquire" used for asking information from the Lord—only for praying to Him: "*Seek* Me, and you will live" (Amos 5:4); "I *turned* to the LORD, and He answered me; He saved me from all my terrors" (Ps. 34:5).

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **21 On behalf of his wife.** He knew that he himself was not barren from the promise given to Abraham in 21:12, "it is through Isaac that offspring shall be continued for you" (Hizkuni). Isaac was also naturally barren, as his father and mother had been; he required God's special providence in order to have children, as Abraham had been promised (Abarbanel). **Because she was barren.** Why was Rebekah barren? So that the other nations should not say: It was because of our prayer ("May you grow into thousands of myriads," 24:60) that she had children (Hizkuni).

22 The children struggled in her womb. Rather, they "broke"; compare the "*bruised* reed" of Isa. 42:3. She thought her labor pains had begun, but since she was not yet due, she was afraid she was miscarrying (Bekhor Shor). Twins are expected to be similar, sharing both the same parents and the same astrological background; but these two were of opposite natures. Clearly, this was arranged by God's will (Abarbanel). One of them might die in the womb, endangering my life (Sforno). **If so, why . . . ?** If I am miscarrying, why did I get

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NJPS went to inquire of the LORD, 23and the LORD answered her,

"Two nations are in your womb,
Two separate peoples shall issue from your body;
One people shall be mightier than the other,
And the older shall serve the younger."

24When her time to give birth was at

OJPS And she went to inquire of the LORD. 23And the LORD said unto her:

Two nations are in thy womb,
and two peoples shall be separated from thy bowels;
and the one people shall be stronger than the other people;
and the elder shall serve the younger.

24And when her days to be delivered

23 וַיֹּ֣אמֶר יְהוָ֔ה לָ֣הּ
שְׁנֵ֤י גוֹיִם֙ בְּבִטְנֵ֔ךְ
וּשְׁנֵ֥י לְאֻמִּ֖ים מִמֵּעַ֑יִךְ יִפָּרֵ֔דוּ
וּלְאֹם֙ מִלְאֹ֣ם יֵאָ֔מֵץ
וְרַ֖ב יַעֲבֹ֥ד צָעִֽיר׃
24 וַיִּמְלְא֣וּ יָמֶ֔יהָ לָלֶ֑דֶת וְהִנֵּ֥ה תוֹמִ֖ם*

v. 24. חסר א׳ י׳

RASHI **23 The LORD answered her.** Via an intermediary. The Holy Spirit answered Shem, who told her. **Two nations are in your womb.** "Nations" [*goyim*] is how the word is to be read, but what is written is "rulers" [*ge'im*]. The two rulers are Antoninus, the Roman ruler, **[B]** and R. Judah the Prince, the patriarch of the Jews, from whose tables radishes and lettuce were never absent, either in summer or winter. **Two separate peoples.** The Hebrew noun is another synonym for a "nation," that is, "a kingdom." **Shall issue from your body.** Rather, they "shall be separated" (OJPS)—from the moment they issue from your body they shall separate, one to wickedness and the other to innocence. **One people shall be mightier than the other.** They will never be of equal strength; when one rises, the other falls: "I shall be filled, now that it [Jerusalem] is laid in ruins" (Ezek. 26:2).

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ How does "two nations are in your womb" (v. 23) explain why they were struggling? Fetuses have no free will or knowledge of the future. ✦ Why did the divine will insist that these two future chieftains of peoples be born as twins? Isaac and Ishmael were also the progenitors of peoples, and they were not twins or even born from the same mother.

24 When her time to give birth was at hand. More literally, "when her days to be delivered were fulfilled" (OJPS). But of Tamar we read, "when the time came that she gave

[B] The Edomites (see v. 30) are equated in Jewish tradition with the Romans.

KIMHI **23 The LORD answered her.** Whether via Abraham or Shem. **Two nations are in your womb.** Ordinarily two children born of the same mother and father would produce only a single nation. **Two separate peoples shall issue from your body.** As we have written numerous times, the text often repeats the same meaning in different words. **The older shall serve the younger.** Rather, "the older the younger shall serve." The mark of the direct object is absent, deliberately leaving the subject of the sentence in doubt. There is a tendency for the first noun in such a phrase to be the subject except when there is no room for doubt, as in "Stone, water wears away" (Job 14:19) and "water, fire makes boil" (Isa. 64:1). In our phrase, the ambiguity is because sometimes the older would serve the younger (as in David's time) and sometimes the younger would serve the older (as it is today). But the older comes first because the older would serve the younger more often. That is how it will be again after the restoral of our fortunes. (Even a very short time is enough to make one "the older.")

24 There were twins in her womb. Rather, "behold, there were the twins who had been in her womb."

NAHMANIDES **23 Two nations are in your womb.** He was telling her not to be afraid. The struggling was natural for a woman who was pregnant with twins. It could also be that what He goes on to say was meant to tell her that they would end up contending with each other and had already begun that struggle. But for now they would cease, and she would get some peace and quiet.

RASHBAM can inquire of the LORD—[the prophet] Micaiah son of Imlah" (1 Kings 22:8).

23 And the LORD answered her. Via a prophet. **Two nations are in your womb.** Don't worry. The discomfort you are feeling is because you are carrying twins. Two babies are a more difficult pregnancy than one. **Two separate peoples shall issue from your body.** That is, two kingdoms. Compare the repetition in "all *kings* and *peoples* of the earth" (Ps. 148:11). But here the parallelism demonstrates that the emphasis is on the peoples of the two kingdoms. **[C] One people shall be mightier than the other.** Having begun by telling her this much, the prophet went on to tell her what the outcome would be. **And the older shall serve the younger.** That is why "Rebekah loved Jacob" (v. 28, OJPS): because "—declares the LORD—Esau is Jacob's brother; yet I loved Jacob" (Mal. 1:2).

24 There were twins in her womb. NJPS omits the word that introduces this phrase: "behold" (OJPS), a word that is always used to introduce something unexpected. See the Hebrew of "When morning came, there was Leah!" (29:25). For until

[C] Others think that an extra letter has crept into Rashbam's comment and that he was contrasting a similar-sounding word that does not appear in our verse.

IBN EZRA this is not normal, why am I having such a weird pregnancy?"

23 The LORD answered her. Through a prophet, perhaps Abraham himself, who did not die until Rebekah's own children were 15. **The older shall serve the younger.** The Hebrew is phrased enigmatically—"the older the younger shall serve." But we can tell that "older" is the subject from the similar syntax (in Hebrew) of "a son should honor his father, and *a slave his master*" (Mal. 1:6). I will have more to say about this verse in my comment to 27:40.

24 Twins. The א of the Hebrew root is missing in this word, as in (e.g.) "a mere *remnant* of you" (Jer. 15:11).

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS pregnant in the first place? Why did the Holy One accept our prayers? (Bekhor Shor). If I alone had been barren, this would not be strange. But if Isaac too was barren and his nature had to be changed, he should also feel strange. Why is it just me? (Abarbanel). Why did my relatives and my husband all pray for me to get pregnant if this was going to happen? (Sforno).

23 Two nations are in your womb. It is as if one is from India in the far east, the other from Germany in the far west (Abarbanel). They will practice different religions (Sforno). **Two separate peoples shall issue from your body.** You need not fear that either of them will be barren like their father and grandfather; they will both have plenty of children (Abarbanel). They shall both issue from your body; you need not fear that one of them will die in the womb (Sforno). **The older shall serve the younger.** Which explains why there would be no peace between them (Bekhor Shor).

24 When her time to give birth was at hand. Her full term, and not as she had feared (Bekhor Shor). **There were twins in her womb.** Twins all resemble each other—but these two were total opposites. Why were they born as twins? — There is no harvest without

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NJPS hand, there were twins in her womb. 25The first one emerged red, like a hairy mantle all over; so they named him Esau. 26Then his brother emerged, holding on to the heel of Esau; so they named him Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when they were born.

27When the boys grew up, Esau became a skillful hunter, a man of the outdoors;

בְּבִטְנָהּ׃ 25 וַיֵּצֵא הָרִאשׁוֹן אַדְמוֹנִי כֻּלּוֹ
כְּאַדֶּרֶת שֵׂעָר וַיִּקְרְאוּ שְׁמוֹ עֵשָׂו׃
26 וְאַחֲרֵי־כֵן יָצָא אָחִיו וְיָדוֹ אֹחֶזֶת בַּעֲקֵב
עֵשָׂו וַיִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ יַעֲקֹב וְיִצְחָק בֶּן־שִׁשִּׁים
שָׁנָה בְּלֶדֶת אֹתָם׃
27 וַיִּגְדְּלוּ הַנְּעָרִים וַיְהִי עֵשָׂו אִישׁ יֹדֵעַ

OJPS were fulfilled, behold, there were twins in her womb. 25And the first came forth ruddy, all over like a hairy mantle; and they called his name Esau. 26And after that came forth his brother, and his hand had hold on Esau's heel; and his name was called Jacob. And Isaac was threescore years old when she bore them.

27And the boys grew; and Esau was a cunning hunter, a man of the field; and

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why are we told that Esau "emerged red, like a hairy mantle all over" (v. 25) but given no contrary description of Jacob? ✦ How could Jacob be "holding on to the heel of Esau" (v. 26)? Even though Hosea 12:4 reproaches him for it, this is extremely implausible, if not impossible. It might just be possible if they were in the same amniotic sac, but medical science tells us that twins develop in two separate sacs. So how could Jacob grab Esau's heel?

RASHI birth" (38:27), for her days were *not* fulfilled; she gave birth at seven months. **There were twins in her womb.** The same phrase is used of Tamar, but the א and י of "twins" are missing in our verse. Both of Tamar's twins were righteous, but only one of Rebekah's was righteous; the other was wicked.

25 The first one emerged red. A sign that he would be a shedder of blood. **Like a hairy mantle all over.** Full of hair, like a woolen cloak. **So they named him Esau.** "They," everyone, called him Esau because he was *na'aseh*, "fully made," complete with hair, like a grown boy.

26 Then his brother emerged. I have heard a midrash **[C]** that explains this in accordance with the straightforward sense: He was quite legitimately trying to hold him back. Jacob was formed from the first drop and Esau from the second. Think about it. If you put two stones in a narrow tube, when you reverse it the first stone you put in will be the last to come out. So Esau, who was fashioned last, came out first. Jacob grabbed him so he could be the first one born as well as the first one created. If he left the womb first, the birthright would automatically be his. **Holding on to the heel of Esau.** A sign that the one would not finish putting together his empire before the other would arise to take it from him. **So they named him Jacob.** Rather, "*He* named him Jacob"—the Holy One did so. Another reading: His father named him Jacob on account of his holding Esau's *akev*, his "heel." **Isaac was sixty years old when they were born.** It was 10 years after their marriage when she became 13, at which time it was possible for her to get pregnant, after which he waited another 10 years, as his father had with Sarah. **[D]** At that point he knew she was barren and prayed for her. But he did not want to marry a maidservant, having been sanctified on Mount Moriah as a perfect offering.

27 When the boys grew up. As long as they were children, no one could tell the difference between them. But once they turned 13, this one headed for the schoolhouse and the other toward idol worship. **Esau became a skillful hunter.** He hunted his own father the most skillfully of all: "Father, how does one tithe salt and straw?" So his father assumed that he was extremely particular about the commandments. **A man of the**

[C] Since this midrash is in Genesis Rabbah, some think this is a scribe's comment. **[D]** See 16:3 and the comments there.

RASHBAM then Jacob had assumed it was Rachel. Similarly, "Then Pharaoh awoke: it was a dream!" (41:7). He was not aware it was a dream until he woke up.

25 Like a hairy mantle all over. Of the kind that errant priests wear. **So they named him Esau.** Rather, they—everybody—"called" him Esau, a pun on *asui* ("made"). Being covered with hair, he seemed ready-made at the time of birth.

27 A skillful hunter. Literally, "one who knows game." He knew how "to hunt game to bring home" (27:5). **A mild man.** An innocent. **Who stayed in camp.** Rather,

IBN EZRA **25 Red, like a hairy mantle all over.** Rather, "red, like a mantle, with hair all over." The Hebrew words for "hair" and "mantle" are not grammatically connected. (But some think they are.) **So they named him Esau.** "They," those who saw him, "called" (OJPS) him this. The name may derive from his birth being a *ma'aseh*, a one-of-a-kind event. For this birth was a great marvel. Everyone is born encased in a birth sac, but in this case both birth sacs opened at once. **[B]**

26 So they named him Jacob. In this case the verb is singular: "*he* named him Jacob"—someone unidentified, perhaps his father, Isaac.

27 Esau became a skillful hunter. Hunting is a devious trade by nature, since most animals can only be taken by

[B] And Jacob was holding on to Esau's heel.

KIMHI **25 The first one emerged red.** As do most babies; but this one was extremely red. **Like a hairy mantle all over.** In this too he differed from the ordinary run of babies.

26 Holding on to the heel of Esau. Symbolic of the hold he would later have on Esau; a man controls what he holds in his hand.

27 When the boys grew up. One busied himself with worldly affairs and the other, his opposite, with gaining wisdom. **In camp.** Rather, "in tents" (OJPS)—in the plural, since he studied with whatever sage he could find.

NAHMANIDES **27 A man of the outdoors.** That is where he spent his time.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS straw and no straw without harvest (Hizkuni). The women attending her realized while they were still in her womb that there were twins (Sforno).

25 The first one emerged red. The unusual word for "red" is only used twice elsewhere, in 1 Sam. 16:12 and 17:42—both times describing David (Masorah). *Admoni* does not mean red; what does redness have to do with "a hairy mantle"? It is related to *adam* ("a man"). Esau was born as hairy as a grown man (Hizkuni). Both his redness and his having hair testify to his extreme natural heat (Gersonides). The red and black humors were most active in him—the opposite of his brother (Abarbanel). **Esau.** "Fully made," already having a beard and showing signs of puberty (Bekhor Shor). The smooth one would slide out more easily and should have been born first; the attending women assumed that he had "done it," pushed his rougher-skinned brother out first (Sforno).

26 Holding on to the heel of Esau. Which he had already been while they were in the womb. According to Hosea 12:4, "In the womb he tried to supplant his brother"; "supplant" is *akav* and "heel" is *akev* (Hizkuni).

27 Esau became a skillful hunter. This prepares us for 27:7 (Hizkuni). As is natural for one in whom the red humor predominates (Abarbanel). **A man of the outdoors.** As is natural for one in whom the black humor predominates, who detests human society

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NJPS but Jacob was a mild man who stayed in camp. [28]Isaac favored Esau because he had a taste for game; but Rebekah favored Jacob. [29]Once when Jacob was cooking a stew, Esau came in from the open, famished. [30]And Esau said to Jacob, "Give me some of that red stuff to gulp down, for

OJPS Jacob was a quiet man, dwelling in tents. [28]Now Isaac loved Esau, because he did eat of his venison; and Rebekah loved Jacob. [29]And Jacob sod pottage; and Esau came in from the field, and he was faint. [30]And Esau said to Jacob: "Let me swallow, I pray thee, some of this red, red pottage;

צַיִד אִישׁ שָׂדֶה וְיַעֲקֹב אִישׁ תָּם יֹשֵׁב
אֹהָלִים׃ 28 וַיֶּאֱהַב יִצְחָק אֶת־עֵשָׂו כִּי־צַיִד
בְּפִיו וְרִבְקָה אֹהֶבֶת אֶת־יַעֲקֹב׃ 29 וַיָּזֶד
יַעֲקֹב נָזִיד וַיָּבֹא עֵשָׂו מִן־הַשָּׂדֶה וְהוּא
עָיֵף׃ 30 וַיֹּאמֶר עֵשָׂו אֶל־יַעֲקֹב הַלְעִיטֵנִי

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ "Isaac favored Esau" (v. 28) should really be translated as "Isaac loved Esau" (OJPS). But why didn't Rebekah love him? ✦ Why are we told that Esau was named Edom because he asked for "some of that red stuff" (v. 30)? He obviously was called that because he himself was red! Something that has an intrinsic explanation should not be given an explanation that arises from coincidence.

RASHI **outdoors**. A man who did not work but simply wandered through "the field" (OJPS) shooting at birds and animals with his bow. **But Jacob was a mild man**. Literally, he was "innocent" of all such pursuits, both in his speech and in his thoughts. The Hebrew word describes the opposite of one who is cunning and deceptive. **Who stayed in camp**. More precisely, "in tents" (OJPS)—the tent of Shem and the tent of Eber.

28 He had a taste for game. Literally, "game was in his mouth," that is, Isaac's mouth; but the midrash understands the phrase to mean that Isaac "was game in his [Esau's] mouth," since Esau hunted after him by speaking deceptively.

29 Once when Jacob was cooking a stew. NJPS follows Onkelos's rendering of the unusual Hebrew verb; OJPS mimics the sound of the verb. **Esau came in from the open, famished**. Murder gives a man an appetite; Jer. 4:31 tells us that it makes even those who see it "faint" (OJPS).

30 Some of that red stuff. The "red, red pottage" (OJPS) was made of lentils. That was the very day Abraham died, so that he would not see his grandson Esau go to the bad,

RASHBAM a man "dwelling in tents" (OJPS) and tending his father's flock, as I explained this phrase in my comment to 4:20.

28 Because he had a taste for game. Literally, "because he had game in mouth," but the straightforward sense of the expression is as Onkelos understood it: "because he did eat of his venison" (OJPS). **Rebekah favored Jacob**. Because she recognized that he was an innocent (see v. 27), and also because the Holy One had told her, "the older shall serve the younger" (v. 23). It was necessary to tell us in advance that Isaac favored Esau and Rebekah favored Jacob because of what is to happen in ch. 27, when Isaac wants to bless Esau and Rebekah tricks him into blessing Jacob.

30 Some of that red stuff. More precisely, "that red, red stuff" (compare OJPS). A man who is in a hurry to get something

KIMHI **28 Isaac favored Esau . . . but Rebekah favored Jacob**. Rather, "Isaac loved Esau . . . but Rebekah loved Jacob" (see OJPS). It goes without saying that Isaac loved Jacob, and in fact more than he loved Esau (which was only because he liked venison), but Rebekah loved only Jacob, because he was on the path of life and Esau on the path of death. Don't forget that by the time Esau had learned how to hunt, Isaac would have been well into his seventies. We are told right away how reckless Esau was.

29 Esau came in from the open, famished. He was so impatient he could not even wait to cook the game he had brought in but had to gobble up some lentils—the humblest of foods—that Jacob (a very abstemious man) had prepared for himself.

IBN EZRA trickery. **Jacob was a mild man**. Rather, an "innocent" man, the opposite of Esau. **Who stayed in camp**. Again the opposite of Esau's "man of the outdoors." But since the phrase literally says that Jacob was "dwelling in tents" (OJPS), it may be the equivalent of Jabal's "those who dwell in tents and amidst herds" (4:20).

28 He had a taste for game. Rather, Esau "[would put] game in his mouth."

29 Cooking a stew. "Cooking" from זיד and "stew" from נזד; but they share a single meaning. For another such pair, see "shall not abide" (6:3) and "its sheath" (1 Chron. 21:27). **Famished**. Ordinarily this Hebrew word means "fatigued"; compare "faint" of OJPS. But as in "brooks of water . . . in a languishing land" (Isa. 32:2), here it means he was hungry and thirsty.

30 Give me some . . . to gulp down. The verb is hapax, occurring nowhere else

NAHMANIDES **28 He had a taste for game**. The commentators explain the Hebrew phrase to mean that Esau would bring game to Isaac or put it "in his mouth"—though no such verb is in our phrase. This is a recognized phenomenon; e.g., "He waited seven days, the time that Samuel [had set]" (1 Sam. 13:8). But our verse could be explaining that Isaac loved Esau because there was always "game in his mouth"—he did indeed have a taste for game, and it was always in his mouth. He ate nothing else. Esau—a "skillful hunter" (v. 27)—would bring it to him. In my view, however, our phrase is a metaphor. Esau was "game in his [father's] mouth"—that was his regular occupation. Compare "You dwell in the midst of deceit" (Jer. 9:5); "I am all prayer" (Ps. 109:4). Genesis Rabbah seems to take it this way, saying that Esau was always on the lookout for good food and drink for his father.

30 Some of that red stuff. The stew was red because it was made of red lentils or seasoned with something red. But Esau did not know what it was; he just called it "red stuff." **Which is why he was named Edom**. People made fun of him for selling his birthright

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS (Abarbanel). **Who stayed in camp**. Rather, "dwelling in tents" (OJPS) as shepherds do; this too is preparing us to learn that Jacob will tend Laban's flocks (Hizkuni). "Tents" of both kinds: the kind that shepherds shelter in, and the "tent not to be transported" of Isa. 33:20, in which he meditated in an attempt to recognize his Creator (Sforno).

28 Isaac favored Esau. Because he was his first-born, and because he did not know that Rebekah had been told (in v. 23) that "the older shall serve the younger" (Abarbanel). **Because he had a taste for game**. Rather, "because hunting was in his [Esau's] mouth." Isaac favored him because Esau was always talking about his exciting adventures on the hunt (Abarbanel). **Rebekah favored Jacob**. Because he was a shepherd; women like men who are raising lambs and kids (Bekhor Shor). "Favored" is a one-time verb when Isaac "favored" Esau, but a continuing process when Rebekah "favored" Jacob. Rebekah loved Jacob (see OJPS) always, but Isaac loved Esau only when he brought him game (Hizkuni).

29 Famished. Hunters sometimes find themselves lost in the woods for three or four days. So it was with Esau, who by this point was so weak he could literally not raise his hand to his mouth, as the next verse tells us (Bekhor Shor).

30 Give me some of that red stuff to gulp down. Rather, "pour it down my throat." I am too weak even to eat it on my own, let alone to reach father's house. — He had found Jacob, with the flock, far outside the town. If he had had to wait for the food to be cooked,

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NJPS I am famished"—which is why he was named Edom. [31]Jacob said, "First sell me your birthright." [32]And Esau said, "I am at the point of death, so of what use is

OJPS for I am faint." Therefore was his name called Edom. [31]And Jacob said: "Sell me first thy birthright." [32]And Esau said: "Behold, I am at the point to die; and what

נָא֙ מִן־הָאָדֹ֣ם הָאָדֹ֔ם הַזֶּ֖ה כִּ֣י עָיֵ֑ף אָנֹכִ֕י
עַל־כֵּ֛ן קָרָֽא־שְׁמ֥וֹ אֱד֖וֹם׃ 31 וַיֹּ֣אמֶר יַעֲקֹ֔ב
מִכְרָ֥ה כַיּ֛וֹם אֶת־בְּכֹרָתְךָ֖ לִֽי׃ 32 וַיֹּ֣אמֶר
עֵשָׂ֔ו הִנֵּ֥ה אָנֹכִ֖י הוֹלֵ֣ךְ לָמ֑וּת וְלָמָּה־זֶּ֥ה לִ֖י

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ If Jacob was such a "mild man" (v. 27), what possessed him to demand that Esau "sell me your birthright" (v. 31) for a plate of stew? How could a God-fearing man take advantage like this of someone who was famished and fatigued? ✦ Exactly what did Jacob expect to get out of this transaction? He could not expect to get a double share of the inheritance, something the Torah instituted only later; and as for blessing, the Holy One could certainly bless whomever He wished to bless.

RASHI which would not fit with the contented old age promised him by the Holy One. So he died at 175, five years younger than his son Isaac, who died at 180. Jacob was cooking lentils to feed them to Isaac, who was in mourning. And why are lentils a traditional food for mourners? Because they are round, like mourning, which keeps coming around. Lentils have no mouth, just as a mourner has no mouth—for mourners are forbidden to speak. That is why it is also customary that the first thing the mourner eats is an egg, since eggs too are round and have no mouth. As we read in B. MK 21b, "A mourner is forbidden to greet anyone during the first three days; from the third day to the seventh, he responds to greetings but does not initiate them. **To gulp down.** "Let me swallow" of OJPS gives a better sense of the unusual Hebrew verb: "Stuff me full!" According to rabbinic sources this is how one feeds a camel, shoveling the food directly into its mouth.

31 First. Rather, as the Hebrew literally says, "as the day"—sell it to me clearly, as clearly as today is today. **Your birthright.** Literally, "your status as first-born." At that time, religious rituals were still performed by the first-born. Jacob thought, "This wicked man is not worthy of offering sacrifice before the Holy One."

32 I am at the point of death. Literally, "I am going to die." This status of first-born is going away, after all; eventually the tribe of Levi will take it. Esau asked further, "What is the nature of this worship?" Jacob replied, "There are many prohibitions involved, potentially leading to punishment and even death." — As we learn in B. Sanh. 22b, "Those

KIMHI **31 First.** Literally, "as of today"—this very day. **Sell me your birthright.** It galled Jacob to have to treat Esau (who did not deserve it) with respect, but he could not avoid it; it was customary to treat the first-born that way.

32 Esau said. He said this to Jacob or perhaps just thought it to himself.

NAHMANIDES for a bit of *adom*, "red stuff." For "guzzlers and gluttons will be impoverished" (Prov. 23:21).

31 First sell me your birthright. Despite what Rashi says about "first," the straightforward sense is simply that Jacob is saying "right now." Compare the use of the same word in "Let them *first* turn the suet into smoke, and then take as much as you want" (1 Sam. 2:16) and "you stop here a *moment*" (1 Sam. 9:27). Onkelos seems to think the birthright could not be sold until after their father's death, when it would actually come into the possession of the first-born, and so he interprets the Hebrew expression literally: Sell me the birthright "as of that day." We do find this use of the preposition: "*When* they go, I will spread My net over them" (Hosea 7:12). Some say the stew was not the price of the birthright; by "sell" Jacob meant "for money" (which Esau was willing to do), after which they sat down to eat. The text simply does not say what the price was. But that is not my view.

RASHBAM will often repeat his words in this way. In this case, Esau was tired and hungry and was in a hurry to get something to eat. **Which is why he was named Edom.** Both because of the red (*adom*) stuff that he wanted to eat and because he himself was a redhead (*admoni*). He sold off his birthright for some "red stuff" just because he was famished, so the nickname is certainly intended to be pejorative.

31 First sell me your birthright. The Hebrew says "sell it *today*," but the translations understand the idiom correctly: sell it immediately, on the spot. "Sell me the share of my father's property that you, as first-born, would inherit—sell it to me for money, after which I shall give you the food to seal the deal." Laban and Jacob also eat together to confirm their agreement: "they partook of a meal there by the mound" (31:46).

32 I am at the point of death. I go hunting every day in the forests, where there are bears, lions, and other wild animals, taking my life in my hands each time. What is the point of my expecting to receive a first-born's share after my father's death? — That is how my father R. Meir (of blessed memory) explained this. This is what is meant by "Thus did Esau spurn the birthright" (v. 34).

IBN EZRA in the Bible. But it obviously means "give me something to eat."

31 Sell. For the unusual vowel, compare "*lie* with me" (39:7) and "*send* the boy" (43:8). **Your birthright.** The birthright was the right to inherit a double share of the father's property. Some say the first-born also outranked his younger brother, who was required to rise before him and to serve him, just as a son does a father.

32 I am at the point of death. He took his life in his hands every day when he went out to hunt, for some beast might kill him. So there was a possibility that he would die before his father did.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS he would literally have died. That is why Jacob told him, "If you die, everything will go to me. If I feed you and you live, everything will go to you as the first-born. So sell me the birthright and I will feed you. If you don't have enough compassion on yourself to do so, I certainly don't have to have compassion on you" (Bekhor Shor). He really says, "that red, red stuff" (see OJPS), meaning "that extremely red stuff" (Hizkuni). **Which is why he was named Edom.** He was called Edom because he was *admoni* ("red"). Our phrase is saying that *it* was called "red." Esau was famished, which was why *he* called the *stew* "red stuff." He was so hungry he did not care what it was. The change from *adom* to *edom* is inconsequential; see Lam. 2:17 and Ps. 128:3 for comparable forms (Abarbanel). With the *e* vowel, *edom* becomes an imperative. Fine, "Be red!"—referring to stuffing it down his gullet (Sforno).

31 First sell me your birthright. Rather, "sell me your birthright [forever] as today." Assure me that you will always stand behind the sale, just as you do today (Bekhor Shor). Isaac had enough wealth for them both; that was not Jacob's concern. Nor was he interested in honor (see 32:5). He was trying to make sure he would receive the blessing of Abraham. He was convinced that they could not share it (Abarbanel). If you are "as today," when a day of hunting has so exhausted you that you can't recognize a pot of stew, you certainly will not have the strength to serve the Holy One as the first-born is supposed to (Sforno).

32 I am at the point of death. Rather, "I am going to die," but the inheritance of the land will not take effect for another four centuries (see 15:13). I am not going to live that long (Hizkuni). **Of what use is my birthright to me?** As for the spiritual aspect of the promises, I don't believe in it anyway. Let it go to Jacob, who does believe that nonsense (Abarbanel).

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NJPS my birthright to me?" 33But Jacob said, "Swear to me first." So he swore to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob. 34Jacob then gave Esau bread and lentil stew; he ate and drank, and he rose and went away. Thus did Esau spurn the birthright.

בְּכֹרָה׃ 33 וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב הִשָּׁבְעָה לִּי כַּיּוֹם וַיִּשָּׁבַע לוֹ וַיִּמְכֹּר אֶת־בְּכֹרָתוֹ לְיַעֲקֹב׃ 34 וְיַעֲקֹב נָתַן לְעֵשָׂו לֶחֶם וּנְזִיד עֲדָשִׁים וַיֹּאכַל וַיֵּשְׁתְּ וַיָּקָם וַיֵּלֶךְ וַיִּבֶז עֵשָׂו אֶת־הַבְּכֹרָה׃ ס

OJPS profit shall the birthright do to me?" 33And Jacob said: "Swear to me first"; and he swore unto him; and he sold his birthright unto Jacob. 34And Jacob gave Esau bread and pottage of lentils; and he did eat and drink, and rose up, and went his way. So Esau despised his birthright.

RASHI who performed the service while drunk or with their hair loose are liable to the death penalty." Said Esau, "If I am going to die from it, why would I want it?"

34 Thus did Esau spurn the birthright. The text bears witness to his wickedness: he spurned the service of the Holy One.

KIMHI **33 But Jacob said, "Swear to me first."** He was afraid that after Esau had eaten he would regret selling the birthright.

34 Jacob then gave Esau bread and lentil stew. He did not give Esau wine; Esau simply drank the wine that was in the house. But Jacob had just then cooked the stew and baked the bread for himself. **He rose and went away.** He went back out to hunt. **Thus did Esau spurn the birthright.** Even after eating he did not regret selling it.

NAHMANIDES **33 Swear to me first.** Swear to me that you have no use for the birthright—as you have just said—and will never claim it. **So he swore to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob.** At which point Jacob gave him the price (or the meal). But perhaps Jacob was making him swear that he would never afterward argue about the price. That is, Esau both swore and sold, but not in that order.

34 Thus did Esau spurn the birthright. "He who *disdains* a thing will be injured thereby" (Prov. 13:13). In fact, we have already been told that Esau had good reason to sell it: it was of no value until their father died, and he did not expect to live that long. But note how the Hebrew reads: "He ate and he drank and he rose and he went away and he spurned . . ." He finished eating and went back to hunting. That is the explanation of "he spurned the birthright." Fools have no desire for anything but immediate pleasures like eating and drinking; they take no thought for tomorrow. Ibn Ezra's comment is totally confused. Who can possibly have so greatly blinded his reason here? His explanation would demand that Isaac had immediately lost all the great wealth that Abraham left him (for this episode took place just after the boys grew up); that afterward he "grew richer and richer until he was very wealthy" (26:13) in Philistia; and that he was once again dirt-poor and dependent on Esau's hunting for a meal in 27:1–4. It is laughable. Don't forget that "after the death of Abraham, God blessed his son Isaac" (v. 11). How could this blessing have impoverished him? True, there are some upright men who are "requited according to the conduct of the scoundrel" (Eccles. 8:14)—but not those who are directly blessed by the Holy One. For "it is the blessing of the LORD that enriches, and no toil can increase it" (Prov. 10:22). The Patriarchs were one and all like kings, with whom the kings of the other nations would make treaties. If Isaac were such a sad sack as to have lost his father's fortune, how could Abimelech say, "We now see plainly that the LORD has been with you" (26:28)? Esau spurned the birthright because he was a nasty person. Moreover, the practice of having the first-born take a double share may not have been operative in those pre-Torah days, in which case the birthright was simply a matter of rank, or at most included just a little bit larger share of the inheritance. As for hunting for food, nobles and kings prefer game to any other kind of meat. If Esau indulged his father's taste for game every day, Isaac's love for him is easy to understand. Asking him to fetch some game before he blessed him was not like asking for a payoff; Isaac wanted to be in a good mood and feel grateful to his son when he blessed him. He may even have understood that the Holy Spirit would rest upon him under those circumstances, as when Elisha asked the king of Israel to get him a musician: "As the musician played, the hand of the LORD came upon him" (2 Kings 3:15). As for Rebekah's not giving Jacob any riches when he left—well, he was on the run. Had she loaded him up with servants and camels, that would only have made Esau more jealous and given him greater incentive to waylay him and kill him. (Indeed, Genesis Rabbah does say that Esau waylaid him and at least robbed him of all he had.) And with regard to the clothes, who says Jacob did not have any? The whole point

RASHBAM **33 And sold his birthright to Jacob.** For money.

34 Jacob then gave Esau bread and lentil stew. After he had purchased the birthright; see my comment to v. 31. **Thus did Esau spurn the birthright.** Eventually he regretted it: "he took away my birthright" (27:36). That is why we are shown here how stupidly he spurned it. Here he trades it away for a meal, but he will end up regretting it.

IBN EZRA **34 Thus did Esau spurn the birthright.** Seeing also that his father had no wealth. Some find this surprising, since Abraham left him a lot of money. Have they never seen anyone who was rich when he was young and poor when he grew old? The best proof is that "Isaac favored Esau" (v. 28)—because he needed him if he wanted to eat. If there was plenty to eat in Isaac's house, and if Esau respected him, Esau would certainly never had sold his birthright for a bowl of "pottage" (v. 30. OJPS). And if Isaac had a table full of delicacies to eat every day, why would he tell Esau to "prepare a dish for me" (27:4)? Why didn't Jacob have decent clothes (see 27:15)? Why did his mother not give him silver and gold for his trip to Aram? If she had, he would not have had to ask God for "bread to eat and clothing to wear" (28:20). As much as she loved him, why didn't she send him some money once he was in Aram? Instead, he had to earn a living herding sheep! When Isaac "grew richer and richer until he was very wealthy" (26:13), that was long before he grew old. Thoughtless people assume that being righteous automatically ensures that you are wealthy too—but the example of Elijah ought to disabuse them of that notion. **[C]** They ask why the Holy One would deprive Isaac of wealth—perhaps they will let us know why He took away his sight, too. (And let them not fob off some midrash on us; see my comment to 27:1.) Others argue, What about his sheep? For Rebekah told Jacob to "go to the flock and fetch me two choice kids" (27:9). Well, he might have had a few animals left—or Rebekah might have been saying, "Go to the place of the flock, where animals are sold."

[C] See, e.g., 1 Kings 17:6 and 1 Kings 19:6.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **33 Swear to me first.** Since he was buying something intangible (Sforno).

34 Jacob then gave Esau bread and lentil stew. Some say Jacob paid money for the birthright and they sealed the agreement with this meal, but I think that is completely imaginary (Bekhor Shor). **Thus did Esau spurn the birthright.** Before the priesthood was given to Aaron, offerings were made by the first-born in each family. Said Esau the wicked, "Why should I dirty my hands with the blood of the sacrifices?" Another reading: he did not want to be taken for a fool because he had sold the birthright, so he pretended it was worthless (Hizkuni).

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NJPS 26 There was a famine in the land—aside from the previous famine that had occurred in the days of Abraham—and Isaac went to Abimelech, king of the Philistines, in Gerar. 2The LORD had appeared to him and said, "Do not go down to Egypt; stay in the land which I point out to you.

OJPS 26 And there was a famine in the land, beside the first famine that was in the days of Abraham. And Isaac went unto Abimelech king of the Philistines unto Gerar. 2And the LORD appeared unto him, and said: "Go not down unto Egypt; dwell in the land which I shall tell thee of.

כו וַיְהִי רָעָב בָּאָרֶץ מִלְּבַד הָרָעָב
הָרִאשׁוֹן אֲשֶׁר הָיָה בִּימֵי אַבְרָהָם וַיֵּלֶךְ
יִצְחָק אֶל־אֲבִימֶלֶךְ מֶלֶךְ־פְּלִשְׁתִּים גְּרָרָה׃
2 וַיֵּרָא אֵלָיו יְהוָה וַיֹּאמֶר אַל־תֵּרֵד
מִצְרַיְמָה שְׁכֹן בָּאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֹמַר אֵלֶיךָ׃

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why must we be told that this famine was "aside from the previous famine that had occurred in the days of Abraham" (v. 1), which must have taken place a century earlier? ✦ When Isaac went to Gerar, why did the Holy One tell him, "Do not go down to Egypt" (v. 2)? He wasn't going there.

RASHI **26:2 Do not go down to Egypt.** Which Isaac was thinking about doing, as his father had done during the famine of 12:10. The Holy One told him, "Do not go down to Egypt. You are a perfect offering, and being outside the land is inappropriate for you."

KIMHI **26:1 There was a famine in the land—aside from the previous famine that had occurred in the days of Abraham.** The first that had occurred since then. **Isaac went to Abimelech, king of the Philistines, in Gerar.** Since Abimelech and Abraham had an agreement about "kith and kin" (21:23), Isaac went to live in Gerar until the famine was over.

RASHBAM **26:1 Aside from the previous famine that had occurred in the days of Abraham.** When "there was a famine in the land, and Abram went down to Egypt" (12:10). The point is to let us know that Isaac too was heading for Egypt, via Philistia, the shortest route. Remember that when the Israelites left Egypt "God did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, although it was nearer" (Exod. 13:17).

2 Do not go down to Egypt. The Holy One knew that Isaac was heading there (see my previous comment).

NAHMANIDES was to disguise him in *Esau's* clothes. Isaac's dim sight may have been divinely caused so that he would bless Jacob; 27:1 presents Isaac's calling Esau as a direct result of his blindness. But according to the straightforward sense of the text it was simply a matter of old age: "Now Ahijah could not see, for his eyes had become sightless with age" (1 Kings 14:4). Deut. 34:4 presents it as miraculous that Moses' eyes "were undimmed" at his age.

26:1 Aside from the previous famine that had occurred in the days of Abraham. Which may perhaps have been the first famine in the history of the world. Otherwise, what would be the point of mentioning it? But I think we are being told that everyone remembered that famine, and how Abraham had gone down to Egypt because of it and by God's grace gained great honor there. So it would be natural for Isaac too to think of going down there in this situation, explaining why he had to be told not to. I think there is an allusion to the future here, just as Abraham's exile to Egypt by famine symbolizes his descendants' exile there. Now, Abraham's sojourn in Gerar was not an exile, since he settled there voluntarily. But Isaac's going down to Gerar was forced on him by the famine; and Gerar was "the land where his father had sojourned" (37:1)—so it must allude to the exile to Babylonia, where the ancestors of the Patriarchs had originally lived. In this exile, at least, they do not start out by taking his wife: "Anyone who molests this man or his wife shall be put to death" (v. 11). Still, he is in exile and afraid. But eventually they tell him, "Go away from us" (v. 16), and still later they come back to him and say, "Let there be a sworn treaty between our two parties" (v. 28). Now, this is just what happened to those who were exiled to Babylonia. They were exiled there amid "the fever of famine" (Lam. 5:10). But once they were there they were not enslaved or oppressed. Eventually some of them became high officials, and finally they were told, "Anyone of you of all His people—may his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem that is in Judah and build the House of the LORD God of Israel" (Ezra 1:3). Though there were some delays and obstructions, the building was eventually authorized "so that they may offer pleasing sacrifices to the God of Heaven and pray for the life of the king and his sons" (Ezra 6:10). **Isaac went to Abimelech, king of the Philistines, in Gerar.** We do not know whether this was the same Abimelech who was king in Abraham's day, or whether every Philistine king in those times was called by that name. Remember that there was one even in the time of David, who "feigned madness in the presence of Abimelech" (Ps. 34:1). Onkelos thinks this Abimelech was the son of Abraham's Abimelech. In any case, Isaac went to Abimelech, who had made a pact with his father, hoping that he would take care of him and prevent him from having to go down to Egypt. And indeed Abimelech did nothing to him or his household, because of that very pact. But "the men of the place asked him about his wife" (v. 7). Even so, no one touched her, for they all remembered what had happened with Abraham. That is why Abimelech said, "One of the people might have lain with your wife" (v. 10)—I was careful not to touch her, but someone else might well have done so, and "you would have brought guilt upon us" as happened to us with your father.

2 Do not go down to Egypt. Our Sages explain why: "You were a perfect offering, and it is not fitting for you to go outside the land." But see also my first comment to v. 1. **Stay in the land which I point out to you.** It makes no sense to say that "reside in this land," which immediately follows in v. 3, is simply a repetition of "stay in the land which I point out to you." Our phrase must mean, "stay in whichever land which I point out to you whenever I do so." Like the Israelites in the desert, he was to "break camp" and "make camp" at the Lord's command. Though the Hebrew does not explicitly say so (see OJPS), it is quite possible that "the LORD *had* appeared to him" (as NJPS translates) and told him this before he went to Philistia. In that case, "reside in this land" would refer in general to the land of

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **26:1 There was a famine in the land—aside from the previous famine that had occurred in the days of Abraham.** These were the only two years of famine that had occurred there since Abraham came to the land—whether because "it is a land which the LORD your God looks after, on which the LORD your God always keeps His eye, from year's beginning to year's end" (Deut. 11:12) or because of the special providence extended personally to Abraham and Isaac (Gersonides). The Holy One did not want Abraham to have to go down to Egypt again, as he had during the original famine. But He caused another famine immediately after Abraham's death, to let the inhabitants know that the plenty they had experienced was due to Abraham's merit (Abarbanel). **Isaac went to Abimelech.** To ask his leave, out of courtesy, before departing for Egypt (Sforno).

2 Do not go down to Egypt. Isaac assumed this was the beginning of the exile to Egypt that his father had been warned about in 15:13; the Holy One told him, "No, that exile is not starting yet" (Hizkuni). He was told not to go down to Egypt for one or both of two reasons: first, because of the Egyptians' disgusting behavior; second, to put off the era of slavery and oppression as long as possible

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NJPS [3]Reside in this land, and I will be with you and bless you; I will assign all these lands to you and to your heirs, fulfilling the oath that I swore to your father Abraham. [4]I will make your heirs as numerous as the stars of heaven, and assign to your heirs all these lands, so that all the nations of the earth shall bless themselves by your heirs—[5]inasmuch as Abraham obeyed Me and kept My charge: My commandments, My laws, and My teachings."

[3] גּוּר בָּאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת וְאֶהְיֶה עִמְּךָ וַאֲבָרְכֶךָּ
כִּי־לְךָ וּלְזַרְעֲךָ אֶתֵּן אֶת־כָּל־הָאֲרָצֹת
הָאֵל וַהֲקִמֹתִי אֶת־הַשְּׁבֻעָה אֲשֶׁר
נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי לְאַבְרָהָם אָבִיךָ׃ [4] וְהִרְבֵּיתִי
אֶת־זַרְעֲךָ כְּכוֹכְבֵי הַשָּׁמָיִם וְנָתַתִּי לְזַרְעֲךָ
אֵת כָּל־הָאֲרָצֹת הָאֵל וְהִתְבָּרֲכוּ בְזַרְעֲךָ
כֹּל גּוֹיֵי הָאָרֶץ׃ [5] עֵקֶב אֲשֶׁר־שָׁמַע
אַבְרָהָם בְּקֹלִי וַיִּשְׁמֹר מִשְׁמַרְתִּי מִצְוֹתַי
חֻקּוֹתַי וְתוֹרֹתָי׃

OJPS [3]Sojourn in this land, and I will be with thee, and will bless thee; for unto thee, and unto thy seed, I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath which I swore unto Abraham thy father; [4]and I will multiply thy seed as the stars of heaven, and will give unto thy seed all these lands; and by thy seed shall all the nations of the earth bless themselves; [5]because that Abraham hearkened to My voice, and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws."

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why did He so mysteriously say, "Stay in the land which I point out to you," and then immediately add in v. 3, "Reside in *this* land"? ✦ Why did the Holy One repeat, "I will . . . assign to your heirs all these lands" (v. 4), which He had just finished saying in v. 3?

RASHI **4 All the nations of the earth shall bless themselves by your heirs.** So that a man would say to his son, "May your offspring be like those of Isaac." That is what blessing "by" something means everywhere in the Bible: "By you shall Israel invoke blessings, saying: God make you like Ephraim and Manasseh" (48:20, the classic case of this phenomenon). The same applies in the opposite way to cursing: "the woman shall become a curse among her people" (Num. 5:27). Someone cursing his enemy would say, "May you be like So-and-So." Similarly, "you shall leave behind a name by which My chosen ones shall curse: 'So may the Lord GOD slay you!'" (Isa. 65:15). Someone taking an oath would say, "May I be like So-and-So if I have done such-and-such."

5 Abraham obeyed Me. When I tested him. **And kept My charge.** Decrees that go beyond the scope of the Torah, like the extra degrees of incest and the extra kinds of activity forbidden on the Sabbath. **My commandments.** Those things that would obviously

RASHBAM **3 I will assign all these lands to you and to your heirs, fulfilling the oath that I swore to your father Abraham.** It is precisely because I assigned this land to him and his heirs that I told him, "Go forth from your native land and from your father's house to the land that I will show you" (12:1).

5 Inasmuch as Abraham obeyed Me. About the Binding: "because you have *obeyed* My command" (22:18). **And kept My charge.** As he did with circumcision: "you and your offspring to come throughout

IBN EZRA **26:5 And kept My charge.** A general term encompassing all the "commandments, laws, and teachings" that he was supposed to keep. **My commandments.** This perhaps refers to the commands to "go forth" (12:1) and "take your son" (22:2). **My laws.** The rules about

KIMHI **3 Reside in this land.** "Stay in the land" (v. 2) now, and reside there always. **Which I point out to you.** As I pointed it out to your father.

5 Inasmuch as Abraham obeyed Me and kept My charge. There is a midrash that says "inasmuch"—with its Hebrew numerical value of 172, only 3 less than Abraham's age at death of 175—implies that Abraham "obeyed Me" for 172 years, starting at age 3. But another midrash says that Abraham recognized his Creator only at the age of 40, which

NAHMANIDES Canaan, which contained many different peoples and many different countries. He was telling Isaac never to leave Canaan, all of which was to be given to his offspring. So Isaac left his own place (because of the famine) and began traveling through Canaan. When he got to Gerar, the Holy One told him, "Stay here." Isaac would obviously not have transgressed anything the Holy One commanded him. As when Abraham was instructed to go to "one of the heights that I will point out to you" (22:2), this did not have to be explicated in detail; see my comments to that story.

3 Fulfilling the oath that I swore. Obviously the Holy One did not have to promise this to Isaac; "He is not human that He should change His mind" (1 Sam. 15:29). The promise was not conditional, and Abraham had no other son to whom it applied. (By contrast, it was necessary to promise Jacob in 35:12 that the promise applied to him, not to Esau.) Apparently our expression is the equivalent of swearing the oath to Isaac himself, since we find no other place where this was done, yet we read elsewhere, "This is the land of which I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, 'I will assign it to your offspring'" (Deut. 34:4; and see similarly Exod. 32:13). The Holy One wished to swear this oath to each of the Patriarchs to demonstrate that each individually was deserving of a covenant with Him and so that the individual merit of each one of them would stand before Him on behalf of their offspring. Since the first such oath would have stood on its own, the others served to give them greater honor and additional benefit. That is why "covenant" is connected with each of them in "Then will I remember My covenant with Jacob; I will remember also My covenant with Isaac, and also My covenant with Abraham; and I will remember the land" (Lev. 26:42)—each of them had a covenant with God. It is also possible that we are to understand this as saying that He would fulfill with Isaac personally the specific promise in the covenant with Abraham that "all the nations of the earth shall bless themselves by your descendants" (22:18). That is, Isaac himself would be used by the nations for blessing. This promise is made to Jacob as well: "All the families of the earth shall bless themselves by *you* and your descendants" (28:14).

5 And kept My charge: My commandments, My laws, and My teachings. Rashi's comment is based on the notion that Abraham observed the entire Torah even before it was given. Our verse is cited in Genesis Rabbah as the basis for saying that when Joseph "gave them wagons [*agalot*]" (45:21), it was a recognition signal to his father, with whom he had studied Torah up to the passage about "the heifer [*eglah*] whose neck was broken" (Deut. 21:6). But if the Patriarchs already observed all the minutiae of the Torah, how could Jacob

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS (Gersonides). **Stay in the land which I point out to you.** Rather, "dwell," that is, as the root is used in Song 1:8, "make dwellings for your shepherds" in the land that I show you, while you yourself reside in "this" land (v.3), the land of Canaan (Sforno).

4 All these lands. "These" is spelled without the usual ה; the remaining letters, אל, have the numerical value of 31, symbolizing the 31 kings of Canaan that Josh. 12:24 tells us they conquered (Hizkuni).

5 And kept My charge. The "charge" that is particular to Me: to treat others with steadfast love (Sforno).

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NJPS [6]So Isaac stayed in Gerar. [7]When the men of the place asked him about his wife, he said, "She is my sister," for he was afraid to say "my wife," thinking, "The men of the place might kill me on account of Rebekah, for she is beautiful." [8]When some time had passed, Abimelech king of the Philistines, looking out of the window, saw Isaac fondling his wife Rebekah. [9]Abimelech sent for Isaac and said, "So she is

OJPS [6]And Isaac dwelt in Gerar. [7]And the men of the place asked him of his wife; and he said: "She is my sister"; for he feared to say: "My wife"; "lest the men of the place should kill me for Rebekah, because she is fair to look upon." [8]And it came to pass, when he had been there a long time, that Abimelech king of the Philistines looked out at a window, and saw, and, behold, Isaac was sporting with Rebekah his wife. [9]And Abimelech called Isaac, and

✦ עקידה

6 וַיֵּשֶׁב יִצְחָק בִּגְרָר׃ 7 וַיִּשְׁאֲלוּ אַנְשֵׁי
הַמָּקוֹם לְאִשְׁתּוֹ וַיֹּאמֶר אֲחֹתִי הִוא כִּי
יָרֵא לֵאמֹר אִשְׁתִּי פֶּן־יַהַרְגֻנִי אַנְשֵׁי
הַמָּקוֹם עַל־רִבְקָה כִּי־טוֹבַת מַרְאֶה הִיא׃
8 וַיְהִי כִּי אָרְכוּ־לוֹ שָׁם הַיָּמִים וַיַּשְׁקֵף
אֲבִימֶלֶךְ מֶלֶךְ פְּלִשְׁתִּים בְּעַד הַחַלּוֹן וַיַּרְא
וְהִנֵּה יִצְחָק מְצַחֵק אֵת רִבְקָה אִשְׁתּוֹ׃
9 וַיִּקְרָא אֲבִימֶלֶךְ לְיִצְחָק וַיֹּאמֶר אַךְ הִנֵּה

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why did Isaac say of Rebekah, "She is my sister" (v. 7)? Didn't he know what had happened to Abraham in that very place for saying this? Why did he repeat the same foolish behavior?

RASHI be prohibited even if they had not been written in the Torah, like theft and murder. **My laws.** The prohibitions that the evil impulse and the non-Jews make fun of, like eating pork and wearing linsey-woolsey, for which there is no reason other than that they are commands issued by the king to his servants. **And My teachings.** That is, "my Torahs," to include not only the written Torah but also the Oral Torah, those laws we identify as "given to Moses at Sinai."

8 When some time had passed. Isaac thought, "I don't need to worry any longer; if they have not abused her yet, they are not going to." And he dropped his guard. **Looking out of the window.** Rather, "looking *through* the window." He saw Isaac having sex with her.

KIMHI is more plausible. **My commandments, My laws, and My teachings.** For even some of the things commanded to all human beings have reasons that are understood only by the wise.

9 Abimelech sent for Isaac. This was not the same Abimelech as in the days of Abraham, who would have realized what was going on. But Abimelech was a common name among the Philistine kings. **So she is your wife!** A man does not "fondle" his sister.

NAHMANIDES set up a pillar? And Moses set up 12 of them! **[A]** How could Jacob marry two sisters **[B]** (or four, according to our Sages)? **[C]** How could Amram marry his own aunt? **[D]** How could they all permit themselves to violate the Torah in this way if Abraham had accepted these prohibitions and been rewarded for doing so? Remember that he would "instruct his children and his posterity to keep the way of the LORD" (18:19). As for the separate tradition that Jacob observed the Sabbath—that is quite possible. The Sabbath, after all, is understood to be equal to the entire rest of the Torah, since it testifies to the story of creation. In our verse, counting "My [singular] charge" as one and "My [plural] commandments, My laws, and My teachings" as two each makes a total of seven, perhaps alluding to the seven commandments that all the descendants of Noah must obey; Abraham, so careful to follow the will of his Creator, may well have taken care to observe them in the particular ways the Torah requires. So too the "one hundred measures" of the literal Hebrew here in v. 12 may be involved with Isaac's tithing, for we know the Patriarchs were generous in this way. It does seem to me that our Sages believed Abraham had learned the entire Torah from the Holy Spirit, studied it carefully, and observed it voluntarily. But he observed it only inside the land, and the exceptions noted above all took place outside the land. The commandments, though, are "the rules of the God of the land" (2 Kings 17:26). I will discuss all this more extensively elsewhere, with God's help. **[E]** On stone pillars, see further my comments to 28:18 and Deut. 16:22. Joseph is said by our tradition to have observed the Sabbath (like his father) in Egypt, but this was to teach his children about creation and keep them from following Egyptian idolatry. That is the point of these rabbinic traditions. In any case, the straightforward sense of "kept My charge" is that Abraham believed in the Holy One himself and attempted to win others for that belief; of "My commandments," that he did everything he was personally commanded to do; of "My laws," that (like the Holy One) he was gracious, merciful, charitable, and just, and taught his children to be the same; and of "My teachings," that he circumcised himself, his sons, and his servants, and kept all the commandments given to the children of Noah, which was "Torah" for them (as the Hebrew word literally says).

7 He said, "She is my sister." They did not ask him about his sons; he would have told them they were his sons by some other woman.

[A] See 28:18 and Exod. 24:4; this is forbidden by Lev. 26:1. **[B]** Rachel and Leah. This is forbidden by Lev. 18:18. **[C]** Genesis Rabbah explains "the daughters are my daughters" (31:43) to mean that Bilhah and Zilpah were also Laban's daughters. **[D]** See Exod. 6:20; Lev. 18:12, 18:14, and 20:20 all forbid this. **[E]** See Nahmanides' comment to Lev. 18:25.

RASHBAM the ages shall *keep* My covenant" (17:9). **My commandments.** Like circumcising Isaac on the eighth day "as God had *commanded* him" (21:4). **My laws and My teachings.** The evident straightforward sense of this expression is that it refers to those things that obviously should or should not be done: e.g., prohibitions against theft, incest, coveting; setting up a legal system; hospitality for those who need it. All these were in effect before the giving of the Torah, at which time (for Israel) they were renewed and further explicated, and the Jews made a covenant to observe them.

8 When some time had passed. By now, he was no longer so careful to avoid treating his wife as if they were married, since no one apparently intended to take her from him. **Fondling.** That is, having sex. This is the same word Potiphar's wife uses: "The Hebrew slave whom you brought into our house came to me to *dally* with me" (39:17), which she had previously said more explicitly: "This one came to *lie* with me" (39:14).

IBN EZRA keeping things as God made them; see my comment about this phrase in Lev. 19:19. These are natural laws, implanted in the human mind. **My teachings.** That he circumcised himself, his sons, and his servants. I will explain all this in my comments to Exod. 24:12.

6 So Isaac stayed in Gerar. As the Lord had commanded him.

7 Thinking. This word is not in the Hebrew (see OJPS), but it is certainly to be understood; compare "And the second he named Ephraim, *meaning*, 'God has made me fertile in the land of my affliction'" (41:52).

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **7 The men of the place asked him about his wife.** Remembering what had happened with Abraham (Abarbanel). **She is my sister.** That is, "my relative"; he was not lying (Abarbanel). **She is beautiful.** Because she had borne children, she was no longer (as 24:16 calls her) "*very* beautiful" (Hizkuni).

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NJPS your wife! Why then did you say: 'She is my sister?'" Isaac said to him, "Because I thought I might lose my life on account of her." [10]Abimelech said, "What have you done to us! One of the people might have lain with your wife, and you would have brought guilt upon us." [11]Abimelech then charged all the people, saying, "Anyone who molests this man or his wife shall be put to death."

[12]Isaac sowed in that land and reaped a hundredfold the same year. The LORD blessed him, [13]and the man grew richer and richer until he was very wealthy: [14]he acquired flocks and herds, and a large household, so that the Philistines envied him. [15]And the Philistines stopped up all the wells which his father's servants had dug in the days of his father Abraham, filling them with earth. [16]And Abimelech

OJPS said: "Behold, of a surety she is thy wife; and how saidst thou: She is my sister?" And Isaac said unto him: "Because I said: Lest I die because of her." [10]And Abimelech said: "What is this thou hast done unto us? one of the people might easily have lain with thy wife, and thou wouldest have brought guiltiness upon us." [11]And Abimelech charged all the people, saying: "He that toucheth this man or his wife shall surely be put to death."

[12]And Isaac sowed in that land, and found in the same year a hundredfold; and the LORD blessed him. [13]And the man waxed great, and grew more and more until he became very great. [14]And he had possessions of flocks, and possessions of herds, and a great household; and the Philistines envied him. [15]Now all the wells which his father's servants had digged in the days of Abraham his father, the Philistines had stopped them, and filled them with earth. [16]And Abimelech said

אִשְׁתְּךָ֖ הִ֑וא וְאֵ֣יךְ אָמַ֔רְתָּ אֲחֹ֥תִי הִ֖וא
וַיֹּ֤אמֶר אֲלֵיהוּ֙ יִצְחָ֔ק כִּ֥י אָמַ֖רְתִּי פֶּן־אָמ֥וּת
עָלֶ֑יהָ׃ 10 וַיֹּ֣אמֶר אֲבִימֶ֗לֶךְ מַה־זֹּ֙את עָשִׂ֣יתָ
לָּ֔נוּ כְּמְעַ֗ט שָׁכַ֤ב אַחַד֙ הָעָ֔ם אֶת־אִשְׁתֶּ֖ךָ
וְהֵבֵ֥אתָ עָלֵ֖ינוּ אָשָֽׁם׃ 11 וַיְצַ֤ו אֲבִימֶ֙לֶךְ֙
אֶת־כָּל־הָעָ֔ם לֵאמֹ֕ר הַנֹּגֵ֥עַ בָּאִ֖ישׁ הַזֶּ֑ה
וּבְאִשְׁתּ֖וֹ מ֥וֹת יוּמָֽת׃
12 וַיִּזְרַ֥ע יִצְחָ֖ק בָּאָ֣רֶץ הַהִ֑וא וַיִּמְצָ֞א בַּשָּׁנָ֤ה
הַהִוא֙ מֵאָ֣ה שְׁעָרִ֔ים וַיְבָרְכֵ֖הוּ יְהוָֽה׃
13 וַיִּגְדַּ֖ל הָאִ֑ישׁ וַיֵּ֣לֶךְ הָלוֹךְ֙ וְגָדֵ֔ל עַ֖ד
כִּי־גָ֥דַל מְאֹֽד׃ 14 וַיְהִי־לוֹ֙ מִקְנֵה־צֹ֣אן
וּמִקְנֵ֣ה בָקָ֔ר וַעֲבֻדָּ֖ה רַבָּ֑ה וַיְקַנְאוּ֙ אֹת֣וֹ
פְּלִשְׁתִּֽים׃ 15 וְכָל־הַבְּאֵרֹ֗ת אֲשֶׁ֤ר חָפְרוּ֙
עַבְדֵ֣י אָבִ֔יו בִּימֵ֖י אַבְרָהָ֣ם אָבִ֑יו סִתְּמ֥וּם
פְּלִשְׁתִּ֖ים וַיְמַלְאֻ֥ום עָפָֽר׃ 16 וַיֹּ֥אמֶר

RASHI **10 One of the people.** Rather, "Number One of the people"—the king.

12 In that land. It is called "that" land because it was not part of the heartland of Israel, part of the land of the seven nations of Canaan. **A hundredfold.** Over the expected yield. (The Sages say that these estimated yields were made for the purpose of tithing.) **The same year.** Literally, "that" year, which was not a normal year but a year of famine. Why emphasize "that" land and "that" year? The land was a hard land and the year was a hard year.

13 Until he was very wealthy. The saying was, "I'd rather have the dung from Isaac's mules than all the silver and gold of Abimelech."

14 A large household. More specifically, "a vast undertaking." The word *avodah* refers to a single task; this word, *avudah*, refers to a manifold set of tasks.

15 The Philistines stopped up all the wells. Thinking, "their existence puts us at risk of invasion." **[E]**

[E] Or perhaps "during a time of invasion."

KIMHI **12 A hundredfold.** Rather, "a hundred estimates," 100 times the expected amount based on the amount he had sown.

15 And the Philistines stopped up all the wells which his father's servants had dug. Once Abraham had died they were not afraid of Isaac; and Abimelech, who had had a pact with Abraham, was dead as well. Now, why did they stop them up? Because they were afraid that sooner or later Isaac would have as much power as his father had had and would seize them. They decided, "Let them be neither his nor ours."

NAHMANIDES **14 And a large household.** Of asses, camels, donkeys, male and female slaves. The text does not mention silver and gold as it does with Abraham in 13:2, **[F]** for the wealth that Isaac gained in Philistia was livestock and slaves. **So that the Philistines envied him.** They envied his wealth. That is also the sense of Abimelech's comment in v. 16.

[F] After the comparable incident with Pharaoh; see also the "thousand pieces of silver" of 20:16.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **10 You would have brought guilt upon us.** When the great man of the generation is stricken, those who take shelter in his shade suffer as well (Sforno).

12 A hundredfold. "A hundred" is not meant to be a precise number here (Bekhor Shor). Demonstrating God's great providential care of him—remember that this was a year of famine (Gersonides).

RASHBAM **12 Isaac sowed in that land.** Though it was rocky soil. **A hundredfold.** A field that was expected to yield 1 kor yielded 100 kor. **The same year.** The same year that was a year of scarcity and famine.

14 A large household. Rather, "a large spread" of fields and vineyards. The Hebrew word is related to *avodah* ("labor"), and labor that is not otherwise specified is presumed to be agricultural labor.

15 The Philistines stopped up all the wells which his father's servants had dug. So that his sons could not claim them after his death. This prepares us for v. 18, where Isaac returns to dig them anew. It is similar to our being told as far back as 9:18 that Ham was the father of Canaan. **[D]**

[D] Though Canaan would be involved in the story only later.

IBN EZRA **12 A hundredfold.** The Hebrew literally seems to say "a hundred gates," but note that a closely related word is used for "a measure" in rabbinic Hebrew. He ended up with 100 times the original measure of grain. Note the verb from this same root in "He is like one *keeping accounts*" (Prov. 23:7).

13 The man grew richer and richer. "Grew" occurs twice in the Hebrew idiom (see "waxed" and "grew" of OJPS)—both past tense verbs, even though they have slightly different forms.

14 A large household. Of servants. The Hebrew word may be an adjective used as a noun; but there are nouns of this form, e.g., *segulah* of Exod. 19:5.

14 He acquired flocks and herds. Do not think that because he had taken up farming he had abandoned the family occupation of ranching (Abarbanel). **A large household.** Rather, "a large amount of *workable* land" (Sforno). **The Philistines envied him.** Exactly the opposite had happened to them—they sowed much and reaped little (Sforno).

15 The Philistines stopped up all the wells. Out of their jealous hatred when (in v. 11) Abimelech warned them not to molest Isaac (Sforno).

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NJPS said to Isaac, "Go away from us, for you have become far too big for us."

[17]So Isaac departed from there and encamped in the wadi of Gerar, where he settled. [18]Isaac dug anew the wells which had been dug in the days of his father Abraham and which the Philistines had stopped up after Abraham's death; and he gave them the same names that his father had given them. [19]But when Isaac's servants, digging in the wadi, found there a well of spring water, [20]the herdsmen of Gerar quarreled with Isaac's herdsmen, saying, "The water is ours." He named that well Esek, because they contended with him. [21]And when they dug another well, they disputed over that one

אֲבִימֶלֶךְ אֶל־יִצְחָק לֵךְ מֵעִמָּנוּ כִּי־עָצַמְתָּ מִמֶּנּוּ מְאֹד׃
17 וַיֵּלֶךְ מִשָּׁם יִצְחָק וַיִּחַן בְּנַחַל־גְּרָר וַיֵּשֶׁב
שָׁם׃ 18 וַיָּשָׁב יִצְחָק וַיַּחְפֹּר | אֶת־בְּאֵרֹת
הַמַּיִם אֲשֶׁר חָפְרוּ בִּימֵי אַבְרָהָם אָבִיו
וַיְסַתְּמוּם פְּלִשְׁתִּים אַחֲרֵי מוֹת אַבְרָהָם
וַיִּקְרָא לָהֶן שֵׁמוֹת כַּשֵּׁמֹת אֲשֶׁר־קָרָא לָהֶן
אָבִיו׃ 19 וַיַּחְפְּרוּ עַבְדֵי־יִצְחָק בַּנָּחַל
וַיִּמְצְאוּ־שָׁם בְּאֵר מַיִם חַיִּים׃ 20 וַיָּרִיבוּ
רֹעֵי גְרָר עִם־רֹעֵי יִצְחָק לֵאמֹר לָנוּ הַמָּיִם
וַיִּקְרָא שֵׁם־הַבְּאֵר עֵשֶׂק כִּי הִתְעַשְּׂקוּ
עִמּוֹ׃ 21 וַיַּחְפְּרוּ בְּאֵר אַחֶרֶת וַיָּרִיבוּ גַּם־

OJPS unto Isaac: "Go from us; for thou art much mightier than we."

[17]And Isaac departed thence, and encamped in the valley of Gerar, and dwelt there. [18]And Isaac digged again the wells of water, which they had digged in the days of Abraham his father; for the Philistines had stopped them after the death of Abraham; and he called their names after the names by which his father had called them. [19]And Isaac's servants digged in the valley, and found there a well of living water. [20]And the herdmen of Gerar strove with Isaac's herdmen, saying: "The water is ours." And he called the name of the well Esek; because they contended with him. [21]And they digged another well, and they strove for that

RASHI **17 In the wadi of Gerar.** Far from the city.

18 Isaac dug anew the wells. He dug them before departing from Gerar.

20 Esek. "Dispute." **They contended with him.** They disputed with him.

21 Sitnah. "Nuisance."

RASHBAM **18 He gave them the same names that his father had given them.** So that no one else would be able to contest their ownership.

IBN EZRA **18 The wells.** Note the differing form of the plural construct of this word in 14:10.

19 Spring water. Literally, "living water" (OJPS), water that is always flowing.

20 He named that well Esek, because they contended with him. "Esek" clearly comes from the verb "contended" (*hitasku*), but this root occurs nowhere else in the Bible; our tradition, however, explains what it means.

KIMHI **16 You have become far too big for us.** Some of the Philistines might attack you, even though I warned them not to molest you.

17 The wadi of Gerar. A "valley" (OJPS) can be called a "streambed" (as the Hebrew word literally means) even if there is no water in it: "the town in the valley" (Deut. 2:36). In this case, Gerar Valley was actually the name of the town.

18 Isaac dug anew the wells which had been dug in the days of his father Abraham. To take possession of them again. He needed a lot of water for his livestock.

19 Found there a well of spring water. They did not merely find water, but one of the original wells.

20 The water is ours. See my comment to the earlier quarrel at 21:25. **He named that well Esek, because they contended with him.** The name would ensure that they could not, some time in the future, claim that the well was indisputably theirs.

21 So he named it Sitnah. From *satan* ("adversary"), as if to say, "They quarrel with us wherever we dig."

NAHMANIDES **16 You have become far too big for us.** Even I, the king, do not have wealth the size of yours. It is a disgrace to us for you to have a bigger household than the king does.

17 In the wadi of Gerar. A place far away from the city.

18 Isaac dug anew the wells which had been dug in the days of his father Abraham. Rashi's comment makes it seem that these are the wells they had stopped up in v. 15, but that is not the case. If they really considered them a security risk, they would never have permitted Isaac to dig them out. These must be different wells, in a different place. If "the wadi of Gerar" is not simply Gerar Valley—the name of a separate place—then this wadi must have been long enough to have its far end in a different country. For the Philistines stopped up the wells he had inherited from his father in Gerar, and the king expelled him from the royal capital to some other city, perhaps one that (though still in Philistia) was not under his own jurisdiction. In that locale, there were other wells that Abraham had dug. But when he died, since Isaac was not living there, the local Philistines stopped them up—not out of hatred but simply because they had not wanted to do it while Abraham was alive out of respect for him, thinking he might someday wish to return and live in their land again. When Isaac returned and dug them up, the shepherds of Gerar Valley quarreled with him and claimed that the water was theirs. Their argument was as follows: The well is in the wadi, and the waters of the wadi drain into it, filling the well and diminishing the water in the wadi—which is ours. That is the importance of the "well of spring water" that Isaac's servants find in v. 19. It was water that did not come from the wadi.

20 He named that well Esek. These next few verses continue the saga of the wells. The straightforward details of the story contain no benefit for us, and they reflect no great glory on Isaac; he and his father did essentially the same about them. But there is something hidden in these details that comes to make the future known to us. The "well of living water" (as the phrase in v. 19 literally says; see OJPS) represents the Temple that Isaac's descendants would build; see Jer. 17:13, where the Lord is described as "the Fount of living waters." So the first well, Esek, represents the First Temple, where the other nations would contend (*hitasku*) with us, quarrel with us, and even fight with us until they destroyed it.

21 He named it Sitnah. A harder name than the first one: "accusation." And the Second Temple was indeed named after this well, for "in the reign of Ahasuerus, at the start of his reign, they drew up an *accusation* against the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem" (Ezra 4:6) about building it. In fact, the Second Temple proved an accusation against us until it too was destroyed and we were sent into this evil exile.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **17 So Isaac departed from there and encamped in the wadi of Gerar.** Which obviously could not be far from Gerar itself, after which it was named (Abarbanel).

20 The water is ours. The fact that it is "living water" (v. 19, OJPS) shows that it is flowing to you from our wadi (Bekhor Shor).

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NJPS also; so he named it Sitnah. 22He moved from there and dug yet another well, and they did not quarrel over it; so he called it Rehoboth, saying, "Now at last the LORD has granted us ample space to increase in the land."

23From there he went up to Beer-sheba. 24That night the LORD appeared to him and said, "I am the God of your father Abraham. Fear not, for I am with you, and I will bless you and increase your offspring for the sake of My servant Abraham." 25So he built an altar there and invoked the LORD by name. Isaac pitched his tent there and his servants started digging a well. 26And Abimelech came to him from Gerar, with Ahuzzath his councilor and Phicol chief of his

OJPS also. And he called the name of it Sitnah. 22And he removed from thence, and digged another well; and for that they strove not. And he called the name of it Rehoboth; and he said: "For now the LORD hath made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land."

23And he went up from thence to Beer-sheba. 24And the LORD appeared unto him the same night, and said: "I am the God of Abraham thy father. Fear not, for I am with thee, and will bless thee, and multiply thy seed for My servant Abraham's sake." 25And he builded an altar there, and called upon the name of the LORD, and pitched his tent there; and there Isaac's servants digged a well. 26Then Abimelech went to him from Gerar, and Ahuzzath his friend, and Phicol the captain

עָלֶיהָ וַיִּקְרָא שְׁמָהּ שִׂטְנָה׃ 22 וַיַּעְתֵּק מִשָּׁם
וַיַּחְפֹּר בְּאֵר אַחֶרֶת וְלֹא רָבוּ עָלֶיהָ וַיִּקְרָא
שְׁמָהּ רְחֹבוֹת וַיֹּאמֶר כִּי־עַתָּה הִרְחִיב
יְהוָה לָנוּ וּפָרִינוּ בָאָרֶץ׃ רביעי
23 וַיַּעַל מִשָּׁם בְּאֵר שָׁבַע׃ 24 וַיֵּרָא אֵלָיו
יְהוָה בַּלַּיְלָה הַהוּא וַיֹּאמֶר אָנֹכִי אֱלֹהֵי
אַבְרָהָם אָבִיךָ אַל־תִּירָא כִּי־אִתְּךָ אָנֹכִי
וּבֵרַכְתִּיךָ וְהִרְבֵּיתִי אֶת־זַרְעֲךָ בַּעֲבוּר
אַבְרָהָם עַבְדִּי׃ 25 וַיִּבֶן שָׁם מִזְבֵּחַ וַיִּקְרָא
בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה וַיֵּט־שָׁם אָהֳלוֹ וַיִּכְרוּ־שָׁם
עַבְדֵי־יִצְחָק בְּאֵר׃ 26 וַאֲבִימֶלֶךְ הָלַךְ אֵלָיו
מִגְּרָר וַאֲחֻזַּת מֵרֵעֵהוּ וּפִיכֹל שַׂר־צְבָאוֹ׃

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why did the Lord appear to Isaac in Beer-sheba and tell him, "Fear not" (v. 24)? What was Isaac afraid of? ✦ Why did He tell Isaac "I will bless you" only this once?

RASHI **26 Ahuzzath his councilor.** Rather, following Onkelos, "with a gathering of some of his associates." *Ahuzzath* is not a name but a word, and the *-ath* ending does not imply that it is in construct; for similar forms, see the Hebrew of "*drunk*, but not with wine" (Isa. 51:21) and "Grant us Your *aid* against the foe" (Ps. 60:13). It must be "some" of his friends—that is, *me-* of *mere'ehu* is a preposition, not part of the noun as it is in the "thirty companions" of Judg. 14:11—because otherwise it would seem that the king was bringing all those who were loyal to him wherever he went, having only the one group. The word *aḥuzzath* comes from the verb *aḥaz* ("to hold"). A gathering is a group that "holds" together.

RASHBAM **22 They did not quarrel over it.** Since he had moved so far from their flocks (see the beginning of the verse).

23 From there he went up to Beer-sheba. He was still afraid of them, as is proved by the Lord's telling him "Fear not" (v. 24).

25 His servants started digging a well. But Isaac did not give this well a name until after the visit from Abimelech. Only then (see v. 32) did they tell Isaac about this well, which he named Shibah (v. 33) after the oath (*shebuah*) that he and Abimelech exchanged.

26 With Ahuzzath his councilor. Rather, following Onkelos, "with a group of his companions." Compare Judg. 15:6, where the same word refers to Samson's "wedding companion." The *mem* is not a preposition but is related to the *mem* prefix of participles.

KIMHI **22 They did not quarrel over it.** All this digging and naming was symbolic of the fact that the land had been promised to their offspring as a possession. But even though Philistia is part of the land of Israel, the Israelites never took possession of it, and will not until the days of the Messiah.

23 From there he went up to Beer-sheba. For the heartland of Israel is higher than Philistia: "The Philistines *came up*, pitched camp in Judah" (Judg. 15:9); "Saul said, 'Let us *go down* after the Philistines'" (1 Sam. 14:36).

24 Fear not, for I am with you. He was reassuring him after all the quarreling about the wells. **My servant Abraham.** He did everything I commanded him, just as a servant does.

25 So he built an altar there and invoked the LORD by name. As his father had done.

26 Ahuzzath his councilor. NJPS translates correctly.

IBN EZRA **25 His servants started digging a well.** For other examples of this less usual verb for "dig," see "bury me in the grave which I *made ready* for myself" (50:5); "when a man opens a pit, or *digs* a pit" (Exod. 21:33); and "he who *digs* a pit will fall in it" (Prov. 26:27).

NAHMANIDES **22 They did not quarrel over it; so he called it Rehoboth.** This is the future Third Temple—may it be built speedily, in our own times!—which will be constructed without any quarreling or strife. For the verse "when the LORD your God enlarges [*yarḥib*] your territory, as He swore to your fathers, and gives you all the land that He promised to give your fathers" (Deut. 19:8) refers to the future. As Ezekiel says of the Third Temple in his vision, "the winding passage of the side chambers widened [*raḥabah*] from story to story" (Ezek. 41:7). **The LORD has granted us ample space to increase in the land.** Again, "granted ample space" is *hirḥib*. For all the nations will build the Third Temple and "serve Him with one accord" (Zeph. 3:9).

24 Fear not, for I am with you. Remember that Abimelech had expelled him (out of jealousy) and that the shepherds of Gerar had quarreled with him. He was afraid they would assemble against him and attack him and his household. The Holy One promised him that he need not be afraid. **And I will bless you.** He put into the mind of the king to come to him and honor him even more greatly than he had honored Abraham, for he came with Phicol and many of his other counselors.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **22 He moved from there.** To a place where they could not claim that the water was from their wadi (Bekhor Shor).

24 I am the God of your father Abraham. And My providence extends to you on his account more than on your own (Gersonides).

25 So he built an altar there. To ensure that he would always have the opportunity to receive prophecy there (Gersonides).

26 Ahuzzath his councilor. Rather, "a small group of councilors," not a large armed force; he was coming to negotiate peace (Abarbanel).

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NJPS troops. 27Isaac said to them, "Why have you come to me, seeing that you have been hostile to me and have driven me away from you?" 28And they said, "We now see plainly that the LORD has been with you, and we thought: Let there be a sworn treaty between our two parties, between you and us. Let us make a pact with you 29that you will not do us harm, just as we have not molested you but have always dealt kindly with you and sent you away in peace. From now on, be you blessed of the LORD!" 30Then he made for them a feast, and they ate and drank.

31Early in the morning, they exchanged oaths. Isaac then bade them farewell, and they departed from him in peace. 32That same day Isaac's servants came and told him about the well they had dug, and said

27 וַיֹּ֤אמֶר אֲלֵהֶם֙ יִצְחָ֔ק מַדּ֥וּעַ בָּאתֶ֖ם אֵלָ֑י
וְאַתֶּ֣ם שְׂנֵאתֶ֔ם אֹתִ֖י וַתְּשַׁלְּח֥וּנִי מֵאִתְּכֶֽם׃
28 וַיֹּ֣אמְרוּ֮ רָאֹ֣ו רָאִינוּ֒ כִּֽי־הָיָ֤ה יְהוָה֙ | עִמָּ֔ךְ
וַנֹּ֣אמֶר תְּהִי־נָ֥א אָלָ֖ה בֵּינוֹתֵ֑ינוּ בֵּינֵ֣ינוּ
וּבֵינֶ֔ךָ וְנִכְרְתָ֥ה בְרִ֖ית עִמָּֽךְ׃ 29 אִם־תַּעֲשֶׂ֤ה
עִמָּ֙נוּ֙ רָעָ֔ה כַּאֲשֶׁ֥ר לֹֽא־נְגַעֲנ֖וּךָ וְכַאֲשֶׁ֣ר
עָשִׂ֤ינוּ עִמְּךָ֙ רַק־טֹ֔וב וַנְּשַׁלֵּחֲךָ֖ בְּשָׁלֹ֑ום
אַתָּ֥ה עַתָּ֖ה בְּר֥וּךְ יְהוָֽה׃ 30 וַיַּ֥עַשׂ לָהֶ֖ם ✦ חמישי
מִשְׁתֶּ֑ה וַיֹּאכְל֖וּ וַיִּשְׁתּֽוּ׃
31 וַיַּשְׁכִּ֤ימוּ בַבֹּ֙קֶר֙ וַיִּשָּׁבְע֣וּ אִ֣ישׁ לְאָחִ֔יו
וַיְשַׁלְּחֵ֥ם יִצְחָ֖ק וַיֵּלְכ֣וּ מֵאִתּ֔וֹ בְּשָׁלֹֽום׃
32 וַיְהִ֣י | בַּיֹּ֣ום הַה֔וּא וַיָּבֹ֕אוּ עַבְדֵ֖י יִצְחָ֑ק
וַיַּגִּ֣דוּ לֹ֔ו עַל־אֹד֥וֹת הַבְּאֵ֖ר אֲשֶׁ֣ר חָפָ֑רוּ

OJPS of his host. 27And Isaac said unto them: "Wherefore are ye come unto me, seeing ye hate me, and have sent me away from you?" 28And they said: "We saw plainly that the LORD was with thee; and we said: Let there now be an oath betwixt us, even betwixt us and thee, and let us make a covenant with thee; 29that thou wilt do us no hurt, as we have not touched thee, and as we have done unto thee nothing but good, and have sent thee away in peace; thou art now the blessed of the LORD." 30And he made them a feast, and they did eat and drink. 31And they rose up betimes in the morning, and swore one to another; and Isaac sent them away, and they departed from him in peace. 32And it came to pass the same day, that Isaac's servants came, and told him concerning the well which they had digged, and said unto him:

RASHI **28 We now see plainly**. The double Hebrew verb form implies: We saw it with your father, and now we see it with you. **Let there be a sworn treaty between our two parties**. Rather: Let the treaty that has been between our two parties since your father's time now be **between you and us** as well.

29 We have not molested you. When we said, "Go away from us" (v. 16). **Be you blessed of the LORD**. Rather, "So be you, O blessed of the Lord!"

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Since Abimelech and the others could "see plainly" (v. 28) that the Lord was with Isaac, why did they drive him away? (The Hebrew does *not* say that they could see this "now.") ✦ If they did drive him away, what made them come back after him?

KIMHI **29 That you will not do us harm**. Which they knew he had the power to do, since the inhabitants of Beer-sheba would do whatever he asked them to. **And sent you away in peace**. And we only did so to protect you from the Philistines who were jealous of you.

30 Then he made for them a feast. To establish the alliance between them.

32 That same day. Before the Philistines left. God arranged this so the Philistines would see how successful he was and fear him.

RASHBAM **28 Let there be a sworn treaty between our two parties, between you and us**. Rather, "Let the sworn treaty between our two parties"—us and your father—"be in effect between you and us as well." Remember the proviso in the earlier agreement "that you will not deal falsely with me *or with my kith and kin*" (21:23).

29 From now on, be you blessed of the LORD! Rather, "you, now," make a similar pact with us, and send us away in peace as we have done to you, "you [who are] blessed of the Lord." Compare Laban saying, "O blessed of the LORD" (24:31). In fact, Isaac did precisely this, for "they departed from him in peace" (v. 31).

IBN EZRA **28 Between our two parties**. Note that the Hebrew for "our two" is doubly plural.

NAHMANIDES **29 That you will not do us harm, just as we have not molested you but have always dealt kindly with you and sent you away in peace. From now on, be you blessed of the LORD.** Since you are "now the blessed of the LORD" (OJPS)—not "from now on," but "now"—we cannot molest you. But if things change and you harm us and then you find that one day you must return to our land, we will certainly repay you in kind. We have "dealt kindly with you" by warning that no one must molest you (see v. 11). Even when we sent you away, we did not seize any of the great wealth you made among us. — There does not really seem to be any reason the king of Gerar would be afraid of Isaac attacking him; Abraham promised that he and his offspring would "not deal falsely with me or with my kith and kin" (21:23). But now they thought, "Since we have broken our covenant with Isaac and sent him away from us, he may break his covenant with us in turn, and his offspring may expel ours from the land." That is why they made a new agreement with him (v. 28). They swore that they had not broken the previous agreement but had always dealt kindly with him. Abraham had been an extremely powerful man with 300 warriors of his own and was heroic enough to pursue the "four kings" (14:9) and defeat them; for him to seize the kingdom from the king of Philistia would have been much easier. And the latter may have heard that the Holy One had given the entire country to Abraham. He was afraid that Isaac was as powerful as his father and that sending him away might have provoked Isaac to fight him.

32 That same day Isaac's servants came and told him about the well they had dug. In v. 25. In the meantime, Abimelech had arrived and they made their pact. It seems plausible to me that this was the same well about which Abraham had given Abimelech "seven ewes" (21:30), which the Philistines had stopped up along with the others.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **28 We now see plainly**. The double Hebrew verb form implies: we saw that our land produced "a hundredfold" (v. 12) when you lived there; then we saw that it stopped when you left (Hizkuni). **Between our two parties, between you and us**. That is, quietly—just between us (Abarbanel).

29 And sent you away in peace. They did not want to make this agreement in the city where it would have drawn a lot of attention and made the king look weak (Abarbanel). **From now on, be you blessed of the LORD!** Rather, "seeing as how you are blessed of the Lord," you can't claim that we have not dealt kindly with you (Bekhor Shor).

32 We have found water! Once he "invoked the LORD by name" (v. 25), they were able to do this without starting a fight (Sforno).

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NJPS to him, "We have found water!" [33]He named it Shibah; therefore the name of the city is Beer-sheba to this day.

[34]When Esau was forty years old, he took to wife Judith daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and Basemath daughter of Elon the Hittite; [35]and they were a source of bitterness to Isaac and Rebekah.

OJPS "We have found water." [33]And he called it Shibah. Therefore the name of the city is Beer-sheba unto this day.

[34]And when Esau was forty years old, he took to wife Judith the daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and Basemath the daughter of Elon the Hittite. [35]And they were a bitterness of spirit unto Isaac and to Rebekah.

וַיֹּאמְרוּ לוֹ מָצָאנוּ מָיִם׃ 33 וַיִּקְרָא אֹתָהּ שִׁבְעָה עַל־כֵּן שֵׁם־הָעִיר בְּאֵר שֶׁבַע עַד הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה׃ ס

34 וַיְהִי עֵשָׂו בֶּן־אַרְבָּעִים שָׁנָה וַיִּקַּח אִשָּׁה אֶת־יְהוּדִית בַּת־בְּאֵרִי הַחִתִּי וְאֶת־בָּשְׂמַת בַּת־אֵילֹן הַחִתִּי׃ 35 וַתִּהְיֶיןָ מֹרַת רוּחַ לְיִצְחָק וּלְרִבְקָה׃ ס

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ How are we to reconcile the statement that "he named it Shibah; therefore the name of the city is Beer-sheba to this day" (v. 33) with "Hence that place was called Beer-sheba" (21:31), from back in the time of Abraham?

RASHI **33 Shibah.** From *shevu'ah*, the treaty oath.

34 When Esau was forty years old. Esau's behavior was swinish, like that of the "wild boars" of Ps. 80:14. **[F]** When a pig lies down, he stretches out his hooves as if to say, "Look how kosher I am!" **[G]** So do they—robbing and killing, but pretending that they are decent people. Esau spent 40 years stealing other men's wives and fornicating; when he turned 40, he said, "My father got married at 40, and so will I."

35 They were a source of bitterness to Isaac and Rebekah. Rather, "they were spiritually rebellious." Compare "you have been *defiant* toward the LORD" (Deut. 9:24). Everything they did caused pain to Isaac and Rebekah, for they were idol worshipers.

[F] Whom Rashi identified as the Romans, by which he meant the Christians. **[G]** See Lev. 11:7.

RASHBAM **33 Therefore the name of the city is Beer-sheba.** This is *not* the same as the Beer-sheba of Abraham. **[E]** There were two Beer-shebas. Note 1 Kings 19:3, which specifies about one of them, "Beer-sheba, which is in Judah."

34 When Esau was forty years old. At which time Isaac was 100; remember that "Isaac was sixty years old when they were born" (25:26). We are being prepared for the statement that "Isaac was old" (27:1).

35 They were a source of bitterness to Isaac and Rebekah. This is preparing us to read what Rebekah says at the end of the next chapter: "I am disgusted with my life because of the Hittite women" (27:46). But this has nothing to do with "bitterness" (מרר); it is a Qal active participle, feminine singular, in construct form, of "rebel" (מרה): "I know how wrong I was to *disobey*" (Lam. 1:20). The vowels of the word make this clear.

[E] See 21:31–33.

KIMHI **33 Therefore the name of the city is Beer-sheba to this day.** Though it had already been called Beer-sheba in Abraham's time, this is why it retains the name today.

34 When Esau was forty years old, he took to wife Judith daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and Basemath daughter of Elon the Hittite. Like his father, whom he was pretending to imitate, he did not marry until he was 40. But unlike his father he did not stay away from Canaanite women. The fact that their names are given implies that they were highborn women, whose families were thrilled to be married into the family of Isaac. But Jacob did not marry without his parents' permission even though he too was 40.

35 They were a source of bitterness to Isaac and Rebekah. Because of their bad behavior, and because they always did the opposite of what Isaac and Rebekah wanted, just to annoy them. Again we are presented with a story of Esau's reckless, selfish behavior.

IBN EZRA **33 Beer-sheba.** Either there are two reasons for the name of this city, or it is a different city than the place that "was called Beer-sheba" in 21:31.

34 Judith. Though the same word means a Judean (female), here it is of course a name. Esau did not have any children with this woman. **[D] Basemath.** This is the same woman as Adah of 36:2; she had two names. There are hundreds of such people in the Bible.

35 They were a source of bitterness. Each of them was (note the grammatically singular form here). Some think our word is not "bitterness" (מרר) but "rebellion" (מרה), as in the "wayward and *defiant* son" of Deut. 21:18. But in my opinion "bitterness" is correct; compare "as *bitter* as wormwood" (Prov. 5:4). And of course 28:8 goes on to say that Canaanite women "displeased his father Isaac." This whole episode is intended to warn Israelites away from Canaanite women.

[D] See ch. 36, where the sons of Esau's wives are listed.

NAHMANIDES **33 He named it Shibah; therefore the name of the city is Beer-sheba to this day.** Isaac had dug up this well and given it the name his father gave it, as he did with the others; Beer-sheba too had the same name. Both of them had "sworn" there. This well symbolized the sanctuary that would eventually be built at Shiloh; the stopping up of the well and digging it back up allude to the capture of the Ark and the Philistines' returning it with gifts for God. **[G]**

[G] See 1 Samuel 4–6.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **33 Shibah.** Being the "seventh" well they had dug (Sforno). **Therefore the name of the city is Beer-sheba to this day.** According to 21:31, "that *place* was called Beer–sheba"; now the city too would be called by that name (Bekhor Shor). That is, this was one of the reasons the name of the city was still known as Beer-sheba at the time of the giving of the Torah (Gersonides). Not "therefore" but "similarly"—for the same reason as in the days of Abraham (Abarbanel). Beer-sheba with an *e* marks both the oath and the number 7, but Beer-shaba with an *a*, as in Abraham's time (see the Hebrew throughout 21:31–33), marks only the oath (Sforno).

34 Esau was forty years old. Isaac had not yet bothered to find suitable wives for him or his brother (Sforno).

35 They were a source of bitterness to Isaac and Rebekah. If Isaac and Rebekah had liked them, they would have been living in the same house with Isaac and Rebekah, and when Jacob came to take the blessings, they would have told Isaac, "That's not Esau!" (Hizkuni). Not "bitterness" but "a knife in the gut." The word here is the same used in Judg. 13:5, "let no *razor* touch his head" (Sforno).

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NJPS 27 When Isaac was old and his eyes were too dim to see, he called his older son Esau and said to him, "My son." He answered, "Here I am." [2]And he said, "I am old now, and I do not know how soon I may die. [3]Take your gear, your quiver and bow, and go out into the open and hunt me some game. [4]Then prepare a dish for me such as I like, and

OJPS 27 And it came to pass, that when Isaac was old, and his eyes were dim, so that he could not see, he called Esau his elder son, and said unto him: "My son"; and he said unto him: "Here am I." [2]And he said: "Behold now, I am old, I know not the day of my death. [3]Now therefore take, I pray thee, thy weapons, thy quiver and thy bow, and go out to the field, and take me venison; [4]and make me savory food, such as I love, and

כז וַיְהִי כִּי־זָקֵן יִצְחָק וַתִּכְהֶיָן עֵינָיו מֵרְאֹת וַיִּקְרָא אֶת־עֵשָׂו | בְּנוֹ הַגָּדֹל וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו בְּנִי וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו הִנֵּנִי׃ 2 וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּה־נָא זָקַנְתִּי לֹא יָדַעְתִּי יוֹם מוֹתִי׃ 3 וְעַתָּה שָׂא־נָא כֵלֶיךָ תֶּלְיְךָ וְקַשְׁתֶּךָ וְצֵא הַשָּׂדֶה וְצוּדָה לִי צידה צָיִד׃ 4 וַעֲשֵׂה־לִי מַטְעַמִּים כַּאֲשֶׁר אָהַבְתִּי וְהָבִיאָה לִי

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Isaac's father Abraham did not bless him when he died, nor did Adam bless Seth or Noah bless Shem. Why was Isaac in such a rush to bless Esau? ✦ Why did he intend to bless Esau alone, and not Jacob also? Both were his sons. Why would Isaac sow such jealousy and enmity between his sons? ✦ What does "I do not know how soon I may die" (v. 2) have to do with the blessing? Wasn't he allowed to give him a blessing before then? The High Priest blesses Israel every day! ✦ Why must Esau "prepare a dish for me such as I like, and bring it to me to eat, so that I may give you my innermost blessing" (v. 4)?

RASHI **27:1 His eyes were too dim to see.** Dimmed by the smoke from those idolatrous wives of Esau's. Another reading: When he was bound on the altar and his father was about to slaughter him, the heavens opened and the ministering angels saw it and wept. Their tears came down and fell on his eyes. This is what dimmed them. Another reading: His eyes were deliberately dimmed so that Jacob could take the blessing.

2 I do not know how soon I may die. Said R. Joshua b. Korha: One needs to worry about death from five years before to five years after the ages at which one's parents died. Isaac thought, "I am 123 and my mother died at 127. If I am to die at her age rather than at my father's, I could die any day."

3 Take your gear. Rather, "whet" it, as the word is used on B. Beitzah 28a: "Sharpen your knife and slaughter the animal properly so that you do not feed me with non-kosher meat." "Your gear" is literally "your hanger," that is, your sword; the custom was to hang one's sword from one's belt. **Hunt me some game.** Game that is ownerless, not game that you poach from someone else.

KIMHI **27:1 When Isaac was old and his eyes were too dim to see.** More precisely, "When Isaac had gotten so old that his eyes were too dim to see." Some degree of blindness and deafness is natural in old age—but some grow old faster than others, due to their nature or their behavior. When Isaac became blind, he still had 20 years or more to live, but he thought he was close to death. That is why he called Esau to bless him. His early blindness may have been a case of God's causing suffering to some of the righteous for wise reasons of His own.

2 I do not know how soon I may die. If I die suddenly I will not be able to bless you.

3 Go out into the open. He did not go out hunting every day. **Some game.** Written with ה but to be read without it; the midrash about this is well known. **[A]**

4 Then prepare a dish for me such as I like. He certainly had no lack of food; he was extremely rich. But old people lose their appetites and crave new tastes in their

[A] See Hizkuni's comment.

RASHBAM **27:1 His eyes were too dim to see.** Because of his age. Compare what we read of Eli, "his eyes had begun to fail" (1 Sam. 3:2).

2 I am old now. NJPS has omitted the introductory words ("Behold now" of OJPS; more literally, "behold, please"). "Look, because I am old, I am asking you, please—because I want to allocate to you the blessings that I have to distribute while I am still alive," e.g., the blessing of Abraham and the inheritance of the land.

3 Take. See "Now therefore take" of OJPS along with "Behold now" of the previous verse. As I explained in my comment to 12:11, when this Hebrew word *na* is repeated, the first usage introduces the reason for the request, the second marks the request itself. **Your gear.** Literally, "your hanger," the quiver in which his arrows hung.

IBN EZRA **27:1 His eyes were too dim to see.** Disregard the midrash; **[E]** there is something much more profound going on here, which we ought not to inquire about. The Holy One's designs are subtle, and human intelligence is not profound enough to penetrate them.

2 I am old now. "Now" is indeed the correct translation of *na*.

3 Your gear. A general term; the verse is gearing up to tell us the details that follow. (At least, the next word is not introduced with "and"; but see "Adam, Seth, Enosh" (1 Chron. 1:1). **Your quiver.** Your "hanger," the quiver that hangs on you to hold arrows. Or perhaps "hanger," as in English, is also a term used for a sword.

[E] See Rashi's comment.

NAHMANIDES **27:4 So that I may give you my innermost blessing.** It was indeed Isaac's intention to have Esau get the blessing of Abraham to take possession of the land and become heir to the covenant with God. For he was the first-born. Apparently Rebekah never told him the prophecy that the Lord had given her: "the older shall serve the younger" (25:23). How could Isaac have dared transgress the Lord's command? "This would not succeed!" (Num. 14:41). At first she

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **27:1 His eyes were too dim to see.** We are told this so we will not be surprised that he mistakes Jacob for Esau (Bekhor Shor). His eyes, but not Rebekah's; hers were accustomed to the smoke of idolatry from her father's house (Hizkuni). "Dim" is a homonym of the word "rebuke" in "his sons committed sacrilege at will—and he did not *rebuke* them" (1 Sam. 3:13); as v. 2 in that chapter tells us, Eli's eyes too "had begun to *fail*" (Sforno).

2 I do not know how soon I may die. Since Jacob bought your birthright, if I do not give you something before I die you will lose everything (Bekhor Shor). The Holy One had not told him (as He had told Abraham) which of the sons was to receive the blessing of Abraham, so he had to choose. He naturally picked Esau, the first-born (Abarbanel). The closer the one blessing is to death, the more effective the blessing, for the soul grows more separate from matter (Sforno).

3 Take your gear. Do not return empty-handed or take too long (Sforno). **Your quiver.** So named (in Hebrew) because it "hung" from his saddle (Bekhor Shor). It hung from his belt (Hizkuni). **Some game.** The extra ה stands for 5; Isaac was worried about the five possible ways Esau's slaughtering of the animal might fail to be kosher (Hizkuni).

4 Prepare a dish for me such as I like. The Hebrew word is plural; outside of this story, where it occurs in vv. 4, 7, 9, 14, 17, and 31, it is also found only in Prov. 23:3 and 23:6 (Masorah). "You sold your birthright for a dish, and I shall return it to you for another." Moreover,

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NJPS bring it to me to eat, so that I may give you my innermost blessing before I die."

5Rebekah had been listening as Isaac spoke to his son Esau. When Esau had gone out into the open to hunt game to bring home, 6Rebekah said to her son Jacob, "I overheard your father speaking to your brother Esau, saying, 7'Bring me some game and prepare a dish for me to eat, that I may bless you, with the LORD's approval, before I die.' 8Now, my son, listen carefully as I instruct you. 9Go to the flock and fetch me two choice kids, and I will make of them a dish for your father, such as he

וְאֹכְלָה בַּעֲבוּר תְּבָרֶכְךָ נַפְשִׁי בְּטֶרֶם אָמוּת׃

5 וְרִבְקָה שֹׁמַעַת בְּדַבֵּר יִצְחָק אֶל־עֵשָׂו בְּנֹו וַיֵּלֶךְ עֵשָׂו הַשָּׂדֶה לָצוּד צַיִד לְהָבִיא׃ 6 וְרִבְקָה אָמְרָה אֶל־יַעֲקֹב בְּנָהּ לֵאמֹר הִנֵּה שָׁמַעְתִּי אֶת־אָבִיךָ מְדַבֵּר אֶל־עֵשָׂו אָחִיךָ לֵאמֹר׃ 7 הָבִיאָה לִי צַיִד וַעֲשֵׂה־לִי מַטְעַמִּים וְאֹכְלָה וַאֲבָרֶכְכָה לִפְנֵי יְהוָה לִפְנֵי מוֹתִי׃ 8 וְעַתָּה בְנִי שְׁמַע בְּקֹלִי לַאֲשֶׁר אֲנִי מְצַוֶּה אֹתָךְ׃ 9 לֶךְ־נָא אֶל־הַצֹּאן וְקַח־לִי מִשָּׁם שְׁנֵי גְּדָיֵי עִזִּים טֹבִים וְאֶעֱשֶׂה אֹתָם מַטְעַמִּים לְאָבִיךָ כַּאֲשֶׁר

OJPS bring it to me, that I may eat; that my soul may bless thee before I die."

5And Rebekah heard when Isaac spoke to Esau his son. And Esau went to the field to hunt for venison, and to bring it. 6And Rebekah spoke unto Jacob her son, saying: "Behold, I heard thy father speak unto Esau thy brother, saying: 7Bring me venison, and make me savory food, that I may eat, and bless thee before the LORD before my death. 8Now therefore, my son, hearken to my voice according to that which I command thee. 9Go now to the flock, and fetch me from thence two good kids of the goats; and I will make them savory food for thy

RASHI **5 To hunt game to bring home.** Why does the text say "to bring it" (OJPS)? ("Home" is not in the Hebrew.) If he did not find any game, he intended to "bring" something he had stolen.

7 With the LORD's approval. Literally, "before the LORD" (OJPS), but NJPS understands the sense correctly.

9 Fetch me two choice kids. They are mine; it is not stealing. — For Isaac had written into her marriage contract that she was entitled to two choice kids every day. Now, did Isaac eat two choice kids at a time? No, he offered one as his passover sacrifice, and used the other for the dishes he liked (see Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer). **Such**

KIMHI food. One does not get to eat game every day. **So that I may give you my innermost blessing.** Jacob needed no blessing, since Abraham's blessing was to continue through him. For the same reason, Abraham did not bless Isaac. But Isaac knew that Esau was not a particularly good man and would need a blessing.

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why was Rebekah so insistent on taking this blessing away from her own oldest son, especially when his father wanted to give it to him? ✦ Since Isaac wanted to bless Esau, what made Rebekah think that Jacob could take advantage of blessings given to him falsely? ✦ Why did the Holy One want these blessings given to Jacob via mistaken identity? Why did he not simply tell Isaac, "It is through Jacob that offspring shall be continued for you"? ✦ Are "blessings" of this kind prophetic, ensuring that they will come, or are they a prayer requesting the Holy One to grant them? In this case, if they were prophetic, what difference does it make whether they were spoken to Esau or Jacob? But if they were a prayer, why did Isaac tell Esau that Jacob must remain blessed? What would stop him from praying that Esau be given the same blessings?

RASHBAM **7 With the LORD's approval.** Literally, "before the LORD" (OJPS), that is, "in the name of the Lord." But when Nimrod is called "a mighty hunter before the LORD" (10:9), it is an idiom saying that he was the mightiest hunter in all the world. Similarly "Nineveh was an enormously large city" (Jon. 3:3) is literally "a great city to God." In all of God's world there was no greater city.

9 Go to the flock and fetch me. The Hebrew adds "from there" (compare OJPS)—from your place of work. See my comment to "who stayed in camp" of 25:27. **Two choice kids.** Because goat hair, even that of kids, is rough, like human hair, not soft like lamb's wool.

IBN EZRA **5 Rebekah had been listening.** NJPS translates correctly.

7 Before I die. OJPS translates literally, NJPS idiomatically.

5 Rebekah had been listening as Isaac spoke to his son Esau. And she did not realize that Jacob was blessed even without his father's blessing him. Isaac was a righteous man and would not have stolen Jacob's blessing and given it to Esau just for the sake of a meal. God forbid! But Rebekah, out of her love for Jacob, was extremely disturbed at this possibility. She certainly did not intend in any way to transgress.

7 With the LORD's approval. Rather, "before the LORD" (OJPS), that is, with prophecy resting on him. Isaac did not say this to Esau; Rebekah added it to make Jacob feel the importance of the blessing.

NAHMANIDES had perhaps kept it private because she "went to inquire of the LORD" (25:22) without Isaac's permission, or perhaps she thought, "There's no need to tell him; he is a greater prophet than the prophet who told this prophecy to me." By now, though, she certainly did not want to tell him, "This is the prophecy that was given to me before I gave birth." For she thought that out of his love for Esau he would not give the blessing to Jacob either and simply leave things in heaven's hands. But she knew that if her plan worked Isaac would give Jacob his "innermost blessing," willingly and wholeheartedly. Or the whole thing may have been God's plan from the beginning, to have Jacob blessed as he was and Esau blessed with the "sword" (v. 40). For "actions are arranged by Him alone" (1 Sam. 2:3).

7 That I may bless you, with the LORD's approval, before I die. In fact, "with the LORD's approval"—or more literally "before the LORD" (OJPS)—is found nowhere in all these stories but here. It is Rebekah who says it to Jacob; Isaac did not use the phrase. Jacob's mother told him, "This blessing will be given 'with the LORD's approval,' that is, by means of the Holy Spirit. If your brother Esau gets it, it will be established for him and his offspring ever afterward, and you will not be able to stand up to him."

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS a meal of this kind is the occasion that marks one as the ruler (Bekhor Shor). **So that I may give you my innermost blessing before I die.** Since the birthright has nothing to do with my giving you a gift, Jacob cannot object to it, and I will give you primacy over him—as indeed he tried to do in v. 29. The birthright was simply about the inheritance (Bekhor Shor). He knew that Esau did not follow the ways of the Holy One, and wanted him to do something that would fulfill the commandment to honor his father before coming to receive the blessing. Isaac undoubtedly knew that Esau and his wives were wicked and would have wicked children; he ought to have prayed to the Holy One to let him know which son to bless. But he loved Esau, and that was that. It was not merely his physical eyes that were too dim to see (Abarbanel).

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NJPS likes. [10]Then take it to your father to eat, in order that he may bless you before he dies." [11]Jacob answered his mother Rebekah, "But my brother Esau is a hairy man and I am smooth-skinned. [12]If my father touches me, I shall appear to him as a trickster and bring upon myself a curse, not a blessing." [13]But his mother said to him, "Your curse, my son, be upon me! Just do as I say and go fetch them for me."

[14]He got them and brought them to his mother, and his mother prepared a dish such as his father liked. [15]Rebekah then took the best clothes of her older son Esau,

OJPS father, such as he loveth; [10]and thou shalt bring it to thy father, that he may eat, so that he may bless thee before his death." [11]And Jacob said to Rebekah his mother: "Behold, Esau my brother is a hairy man, and I am a smooth man. [12]My father peradventure will feel me, and I shall seem to him as a mocker; and I shall bring a curse upon me, and not a blessing." [13]And his mother said unto him: "Upon me be thy curse, my son; only hearken to my voice, and go fetch me them."

[14]And he went, and fetched, and brought them to his mother; and his mother made savory food, such as his father loved. [15]And Rebekah took the choicest garments of Esau her elder son, which were with her

אָהֵב׃ 10 וְהֵבֵאתָ לְאָבִיךָ וְאָכֵל בַּעֲבֻר
אֲשֶׁר יְבָרֶכְךָ לִפְנֵי מוֹתוֹ׃ 11 וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב
אֶל־רִבְקָה אִמּוֹ הֵן עֵשָׂו אָחִי אִישׁ שָׂעִר
וְאָנֹכִי אִישׁ חָלָק׃ 12 אוּלַי יְמֻשֵּׁנִי אָבִי
וְהָיִיתִי בְעֵינָיו כִּמְתַעְתֵּעַ וְהֵבֵאתִי עָלַי
קְלָלָה וְלֹא בְרָכָה׃ 13 וַתֹּאמֶר לוֹ אִמּוֹ עָלַי
קִלְלָתְךָ בְּנִי אַךְ שְׁמַע בְּקֹלִי וְלֵךְ קַח־לִי׃
14 וַיֵּלֶךְ וַיִּקַּח וַיָּבֵא לְאִמּוֹ וַתַּעַשׂ אִמּוֹ
מַטְעַמִּים כַּאֲשֶׁר אָהֵב אָבִיו׃ 15 וַתִּקַּח
רִבְקָה אֶת־בִּגְדֵי עֵשָׂו בְּנָהּ הַגָּדֹל הַחֲמֻדֹת

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why was Jacob worried about what might happen "if my father touches me" (v. 12) but not that he would recognize his voice? He might or might not touch him, but he would certainly hear him! ✦ "Your curse, my son, be upon me!" (v. 13)—can someone really take on someone else's curse?

RASHI **as he likes.** The taste of kid resembles that of venison. **[H]**

12 If my father touches me. Better, "feels me" (OJPS). Compare "as a blind man *gropes* in the dark" (Deut. 28:29).

15 The best clothes of her older son Esau. The ones that were clean. Another reading: His "coveted" clothing. It was

[H] Isaac was born on Passover (see Rashi's comment to "next year" of 18:10), and his worry about dying was perhaps occasioned by his birthday. But the comments beginning "Now, did Isaac" are sometimes attributed to Joseph Kara and not to Rashi.

RASHBAM **12 If my father touches me.** Note the *dagesh*; this is from משׁ, as in "You shall *grope* at noon as a blind man *gropes* in the dark" (Deut. 28:29). The *dagesh* replaces the missing consonant.

13 Your curse, my son, be upon me! "On me and on my head!" She was confident there was nothing to fear, relying on what the Holy One had told her: "the older shall serve the younger" (25:23).

15 The best clothes of her older son Esau. Which he wore when serving food to his father.

KIMHI **11 But my brother Esau is a hairy man.** All over, even his hands and neck. **I shall appear to him as a trickster and bring upon myself a curse.** If he feels that I am smooth skinned, he will say, "How dare you try to trick me in this way?!" and will curse me instead of giving me his blessing.

13 Your curse, my son, be upon me! If he curses you, it will be my fault, and the curse will rest on me, not on you, because I made you do it.

15 The best clothes of her older son Esau. The clothes he wore when relaxing among the great men, which he stored with sweet-smelling plants so that they would absorb the fragrance (see what Isaac says in v. 27).

IBN EZRA **11 Smooth-skinned.** The opposite of hairy. The Hebrew word resembles the word for a "part"; perhaps "smooth" implies that all parts are exactly the same.

12 If my father touches me. The verb is geminate. **Trickster.** The Hebrew is from the same root that means "to wander"; in this form, it means "one who misleads."

13 Your curse, my son, be upon me! Don't be afraid that he will curse you. Even if he does, the curse will be upon me, not you. — This is how women's minds work. But Saadia thinks she is saying, "It will be incumbent *upon me* to remove your curse."

NAHMANIDES **12 If my father touches me.** He did not mean that Isaac might check up on him. He meant, "He might touch me accidentally, trying to kiss me or to touch my face affectionately as a father does to a son. If he does, he will realize I am smooth skinned." Personally, I cannot fathom how Jacob had no fear of his voice being recognized. For people can easily be recognized by their voices alone. As our Sages ask on B. Hul. 96a, how can a blind man (or in the dark, any man) be permitted to sleep with his wife when he cannot see her? By "seeing" her voice. Now, if this is possible for ordinary men, surely Isaac, the wise and expert, could be counted on to recognize his sons by their voices. But perhaps the brothers' voices were quite similar. If so, Isaac's saying that "the voice is the voice of Jacob" (v. 22) would have to refer to his gentle mode of speech, and to his mentioning "the LORD your God" (v. 20). Or Jacob was imitating Esau's voice; there are people who know how to do that.

15 Her older son Esau . . . her younger son Jacob. The text is emphasizing this righteous woman's break with custom. For ordinarily parents give honor and blessing and gifts to the first-born. But she, recognizing the righteousness of her younger son and the

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **10 Take it to your father to eat, in order that he may bless you before he dies.** Jacob was like a man running after something he had lost. Esau had agreed not to contest the birthright, but now he was working on a plan to get around the deal. Jacob was just protecting what was already his (Bekhor Shor).

12 And bring upon myself a curse, not a blessing. Just as "blessing" implies profit and increase, so "curse" implies a loss. "If he gets angry at me, he will make sure I do not inherit *anything* from him" (Bekhor Shor).

13 Your curse, my son, be upon me! That is, "your loss." If your father disinherits you, I will reimburse you from my marriage portion, and eventually I will persuade him to return it to you (Bekhor Shor). He will understand that I put you up to it, and will curse me, not you. Another reading: He will not curse you if you bring him tasty food—but I will curse you if you refuse to do what I say. So listen up, and fetch me the two choice kids (Hizkuni). Rebekah knew Isaac's temperament. She did not mean that Isaac would call down a curse upon him, but that he would yell (as Saul does to Jonathan in 1 Sam. 20:30), "You son of a perverse, rebellious woman! I know your mother put you up to this!" (Abarbanel).

15 Rebekah then took the best clothes of her older son Esau, which were there in the house, and had her younger son Jacob put them on. He was not only going to serve his father; he was about to receive rulership. And they would smell like Esau's clothes, since he often took them out to the field with him or put them on immediately upon returning from there (Bekhor Shor).

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NJPS which were there in the house, and had her younger son Jacob put them on; [16]and she covered his hands and the hairless part of his neck with the skins of the kids. [17]Then she put in the hands of her son Jacob the dish and the bread that she had prepared.

[18]He went to his father and said, "Father." And he said, "Yes, which of my sons are you?" [19]Jacob said to his father, "I am Esau, your first-born; I have done as you told me. Pray sit up and eat of my game, that you may give me your innermost blessing." [20]Isaac said to his son, "How did you succeed so quickly, my son?" And he said, "Because the LORD your God granted

אֲשֶׁר אִתָּהּ בַּבָּיִת וַתַּלְבֵּשׁ אֶת־יַעֲקֹב בְּנָהּ הַקָּטֹן׃ 16 וְאֵת עֹרֹת גְּדָיֵי הָעִזִּים הִלְבִּישָׁה עַל־יָדָיו וְעַל חֶלְקַת צַוָּארָיו׃ 17 וַתִּתֵּן אֶת־הַמַּטְעַמִּים וְאֶת־הַלֶּחֶם אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂתָה בְּיַד יַעֲקֹב בְּנָהּ׃ 18 וַיָּבֹא אֶל־אָבִיו וַיֹּאמֶר אָבִי וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֻּנִי מִי אַתָּה בְּנִי׃ 19 וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב אֶל־אָבִיו אָנֹכִי עֵשָׂו בְּכֹרֶךָ עָשִׂיתִי כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתָּ אֵלָי קוּם־נָא שְׁבָה וְאָכְלָה מִצֵּידִי בַּעֲבוּר תְּבָרֲכַנִי נַפְשֶׁךָ׃ 20 וַיֹּאמֶר יִצְחָק אֶל־בְּנוֹ מַה־זֶּה מִהַרְתָּ לִמְצֹא בְנִי וַיֹּאמֶר כִּי

OJPS in the house, and put them upon Jacob her younger son. [16]And she put the skins of the kids of the goats upon his hands, and upon the smooth of his neck. [17]And she gave the savory food and the bread, which she had prepared, into the hand of her son Jacob.

[18]And he came unto his father, and said: "My father"; and he said: "Here am I; who art thou, my son?" [19]And Jacob said unto his father: "I am Esau thy first-born; I have done according as thou badest me. Arise, I pray thee, sit and eat of my venison, that thy soul may bless me." [20]And Isaac said unto his son: "How is it that thou hast found it so quickly, my son?" And he said: "Because the LORD thy God sent me good

RASHI Nimrod's, which he had long coveted. **Which were there in the house.** Literally, they were there in the house "with her" (OJPS). He had several wives of his own, but he left these garments with his mother. He knew what his wives were like and was suspicious of them.

19 I am Esau, your first-born. "I am [the one who is bringing this to you]; Esau [is] your first-born." **I have done as you told me.** A number of different times. **Pray sit up.** Rather, "take your seat" at the table; see Onkelos.

KIMHI **17 The dish.** Not the plate, but the "savory food" (OJPS) that Isaac requested in v. 4. The meat was included and did not have to be specifically mentioned. It was the way the dish was spiced that interested him. **The bread.** Which she had freshly baked.

18 He went to his father. To the room where he was lying. **And said, "Father."** Isaac, of course, could not see that he was there.

19 I am Esau, your first-born. Some wonder how a righteous, God-fearing man like Jacob could lie. But there is no need to wonder. Jacob knew perfectly well that he was more deserving of the blessing than his brother, and that the spirit of prophecy that would rest upon his father would much more readily bless him. For he was much more acceptable to God than Esau. In any case, it is no shame for a righteous man to bend the truth in such situations. When Samuel was instructed to anoint David as king and asked, "How can I go? If Saul hears of it, he will kill me," God Himself told him, "Take a heifer with you, and say, 'I have come to sacrifice to the LORD'" (1 Sam. 16:2). Abraham and Isaac both claimed that their wives were their sisters and were not called liars on that account. They only said so out of fear. As for Jacob, don't forget that he was also obeying his mother, in accordance with "You shall each revere his mother and his father" (Lev. 19:3). And she, of course, was a prophet. As Onkelos translates v. 13, "The curse, according to a prophecy that has come upon me, will not fall upon you, my son." **Pray sit up.** Isaac had been lying down on the bed.

20 Because the LORD your God granted me good fortune. Due to your merit, since I was hunting on your behalf.

NAHMANIDES wickedness of her older son, did her very best to transfer the honor and the blessing from the older to the younger. (V. 42 will repeat these expressions.)

RASHBAM **19 Eat of my game.** Note the *qamatz qatan* used to spell the *o* sound of the imperative verb here, in contrast to the *ḥolem* in the similar-sounding cohortative "let me eat" in v. 25.

IBN EZRA **19 I am Esau, your first-born.** Some say: God forbid that a prophet like Jacob was lying; in fact, his words are to be understood as follows: "I am [who I am]; Esau [is] your first-born." Others think he said "I" quietly and "Esau, your first-born" loudly, but this is hot air. Prophets are divided into two kinds: those who bring instructions from the Holy One and those who foretell the future. If the latter kind finds it necessary to say something not strictly true, no harm is done; but the first kind cannot lie at all. Think of David, who is most certainly called a "man of God" (2 Chron. 8:14) and who himself said, "The spirit of the LORD has spoken through me" (2 Sam. 23:2). Yet on an emergency basis he was quite willing not to speak straightforwardly to Ahimelech, whom he told, "the vessels of the young men were consecrated" (1 Sam. 21:6), when he was on the run from Saul. Elisha, too, when King Ben-hadad sent Hazael to him to ask if he would recover from his illness, told him, "Go and say to him, 'You will recover.' However, the LORD has revealed to me that he will die." He would recover from that illness but would end up being killed. And Micaiah told the king of Israel, in accordance with protocol, "March and triumph!" (1 Kings 22:15). Even Daniel told King Nebuchadnezzar, "The dream is for your enemy and its meaning for your foe!" (Dan. 4:16). (The idea that Daniel was looking toward heaven and saying, "The dream is for Your enemy and its meaning for Your foe" is a midrash.) And of course Abraham himself said, "she is in truth my sister" (20:12), and told the servants, "We will worship and we will return to you" (22:5). **Eat of my game.** The א is part of the root, not a prefix; for the lengthened imperative form, see similarly "*remember* to my credit all that I have done" (Neh. 5:19). **That you may give me your innermost blessing.** As for the suffix of the verb, note the *dagesh* that doubles the נ; some such suffixes are spelled out using נ twice, e.g., "engirded him" (Deut. 32:10) and "beg for My favor" (Hosea 5:15).

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **16 She covered his hands and the hairless part of his neck with the skins of the kids.** You can see from this how strange Esau was; even his neck and the backs of his hands felt like goats' hair (Bekhor Shor). Kidskin is harsher than lambskin, and more closely resembles human skin (Hizkuni).

19 I am Esau, your first-born. Having bought the birthright fair and square, he was completely entitled to say this (Abarbanel).

20 Because the LORD your God granted me good fortune. By having my mother direct me to do this. Isaac, of course, understood that it was Esau saying he had had good luck hunting (Abarbanel).

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NJPS me good fortune." 21Isaac said to Jacob, "Come closer that I may feel you, my son—whether you are really my son Esau or not." 22So Jacob drew close to his father Isaac, who felt him and wondered. "The voice is the voice of Jacob, yet the hands are the hands of Esau." 23He did not recognize him, because his hands were hairy like those of his brother Esau; and so he blessed him.

24He asked, "Are you really my son Esau?" And when he said, "I am," 25he said, "Serve me and let me eat of my son's game that I may give you my innermost blessing." So he served him and he ate, and he brought him wine and he drank. 26Then his father Isaac said to him, "Come close and kiss me, my son"; 27and he went up and kissed him. And he smelled his clothes and he blessed him, saying, "Ah,

הִקְרָה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְפָנָי׃ 21 וַיֹּאמֶר יִצְחָק
אֶל־יַעֲקֹב גְּשָׁה־נָּא וַאֲמֻשְׁךָ בְּנִי הַאַתָּה
זֶה בְּנִי עֵשָׂו אִם־לֹא׃ 22 וַיִּגַּשׁ יַעֲקֹב
אֶל־יִצְחָק אָבִיו וַיְמֻשֵּׁהוּ וַיֹּאמֶר הַקֹּל קוֹל
יַעֲקֹב וְהַיָּדַיִם יְדֵי עֵשָׂו׃ 23 וְלֹא הִכִּירוֹ
כִּי־הָיוּ יָדָיו כִּידֵי עֵשָׂו אָחִיו שְׂעִרֹת
וַיְבָרְכֵהוּ׃
24 וַיֹּאמֶר אַתָּה זֶה בְּנִי עֵשָׂו וַיֹּאמֶר אֲנִי׃
25 וַיֹּאמֶר הַגִּשָׁה לִּי וְאֹכְלָה מִצֵּיד בְּנִי
לְמַעַן תְּבָרֶכְךָ נַפְשִׁי וַיַּגֶּשׁ־לוֹ וַיֹּאכַל וַיָּבֵא
לוֹ יַיִן וַיִּשְׁתְּ׃ 26 וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו יִצְחָק אָבִיו
גְּשָׁה־נָּא וּשְׁקָה־לִּי בְנִי׃ 27 וַיִּגַּשׁ וַיִּשַּׁק־לוֹ
וַיָּרַח אֶת־רֵיחַ בְּגָדָיו וַיְבָרֲכֵהוּ וַיֹּאמֶר

OJPS speed." 21And Isaac said unto Jacob: "Come near, I pray thee, that I may feel thee, my son, whether thou be my very son Esau or not." 22And Jacob went near unto Isaac his father; and he felt him, and said: "The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau." 23And he discerned him not, because his hands were hairy, as his brother Esau's hands; so he blessed him.

24And he said: "Art thou my very son Esau?" And he said: "I am." 25And he said: "Bring it near to me, and I will eat of my son's venison, that my soul may bless thee." And he brought it near to him, and he did eat; and he brought him wine, and he drank. 26And his father Isaac said unto him: "Come near now, and kiss me, my son." 27And he came near, and kissed him. And he smelled the smell of his raiment, and blessed him, and said: See, the

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Even though Isaac wondered, "The voice is the voice of Jacob, yet the hands are the hands of Esau" (v. 22), nonetheless "he blessed him" (v. 23). Why did he go ahead and do that? ✦ Why did Isaac ask, "Are you my son Esau?" (v. 24), when Jacob had told him in v. 19 that he was? ("Really" is not in the Hebrew.) ✦ Why, after "he smelled his clothes" (v. 27), did Isaac go ahead and bless him again? ✦ Why are all these blessings material ones and none of them spiritual ones? ✦ If they were to be material blessings, why are they not the same blessings that Abraham was given?

RASHI **21 Come closer that I may feel you.** Isaac thought, "I am not used to hearing Esau say 'the LORD your God' as this man just did."

22 The voice is the voice of Jacob. Saying, "*pray* sit up" (v. 19). Esau does not speak that politely: "Let my father sit up" (v. 31).

24 He said, "I am." He did *not* say, "I am Esau."

27 And he smelled his clothes and he blessed him. There is nothing worse than the stink of wet goat-wool. We learn, therefore, that some of the aroma of Eden came

KIMHI **22 The hands are the hands of Esau.** He had not felt his neck; the hands were enough.

24 Are you really my son Esau? He loved Jacob but did not want to see him mocking Esau.

25 He brought him wine. So that he would be in a good mood to bless him. They did not ordinarily drink wine with their meals, unless the meal is described as a "feast." **[B]**

26 Kiss me, my son. Ordinarily it is the greater who kisses the lesser (unless two of equal status kiss each other). But Isaac, though he could feel Jacob, could not kiss him because he could not see.

27 And he smelled his clothes. When he kissed him; he could not smell them from farther away. **Ah, the smell of my son is like the smell of the fields that the LORD has**

[B] "Feast" in Hebrew is derived from the word for drinking.

RASHBAM **22 The voice is the voice of Jacob.** Since they were twins, their voices resembled each other somewhat. That is why Isaac mistook the voice for Esau's once he felt that his neck was hairy.

24 Are you really my son Esau? Rather, "Apparently you are my son Esau."

27 And he smelled his clothes. His "best clothes" (v. 15). In those days, such

IBN EZRA **21 That I may feel you.** This is the same geminate verb as in v. 12, but doubling of the ש here is eliminated to make the word easier to pronounce.

25 Let me eat of my son's game. Unlike its homonym in v. 19, in this verb the א marks the 1st-person singular prefix and the א of the root does not appear; compare "I say" of Ps. 42:10.

27 And kissed him. Literally, "kissed *to* him," which indicates a kiss on the hand, the shoulder, or the neck; when the verb takes a direct object, this is a kiss on the mouth. **He smelled his clothes.** The *a* vowel of the Hebrew verb is conditioned by the guttural consonant that follows it; compare "settled" (Exod. 10:14) and "trembled"

NAHMANIDES **21 Come closer that I may feel you, my son.** I am surprised at Rashi's comment (though it comes from Genesis Rabbah). Isaac did not think Esau was wicked. He may have thought that Esau did not use the expression "the LORD your God" because he was "a man of the outdoors" (25:27), always thinking about hunting, who made sure not to use the Tetragrammaton because he was afraid of uttering it in unintentionally in an impure place; Isaac might have taken this reluctance as a sign of Esau's fear of heaven. But the straightforward sense is simply that Isaac recognized the voice as Jacob's.

27 Ah, the smell of my son is like the smell of the fields. For he kept these clothes stored with spices: "All your robes are fragrant with myrrh and aloes and cassia" (Ps. 45:9), spices that grow in the land of Israel; or it may be, as our Sages suggest, that they smelled of

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **22 The hands are the hands of Esau.** Goatskin is very different even from hairy human skin; these must have been specially prepared. On the other hand, perhaps his sense of touch was failing him like his eyes. As Barzillai tells David in 2 Sam. 19:36, "I am now eighty years old. Can your servant taste what he eats and drinks?" (Sforno).

25 He brought him wine and he drank. Wine confuses one's thinking; he would be less likely to make sure it was really Esau (Hizkuni).

26 Come close and kiss me, my son. Isaac had two conflicting bits of evidence: a voice like Jacob's, and hands like Esau's. He did not know which to trust, so he sought a third sign to settle the matter. Esau's smell was like the smell of the fields and Jacob's was not (Bekhor Shor). Clearly Isaac remained in doubt about which of his sons it was; but it was obviously the Holy One's will that he bless Jacob (Abarbanel).

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NJPS the smell of my son is like the smell of the fields that the LORD has blessed.

28"May God give you
Of the dew of heaven and the fat of the earth,
Abundance of new grain and wine.
29Let peoples serve you,
And nations bow to you;
Be master over your brothers,
And let your mother's sons bow to you.

OJPS smell of my son is as the smell of a field which the LORD hath blessed.

28So God give thee
of the dew of heaven, and of the fat places of the earth,
and plenty of corn and wine.
29Let peoples serve thee,
and nations bow down to thee.
Be lord over thy brethren,
and let thy mother's sons bow down to thee.

רְאֵה֙ רֵ֣יחַ בְּנִ֔י כְּרֵ֖יחַ שָׂדֶ֣ה אֲשֶׁר־בֵּרֲכ֥וֹ
יְהוָֽה׃
28 וְיִתֶּן־לְךָ֤ הָאֱלֹהִים שני
מִטַּל֙ הַשָּׁמַ֔יִם וּמִשְׁמַנֵּ֥י הָאָ֖רֶץ
וְרֹ֣ב דָּגָ֔ן וְתִירֹֽשׁ׃
29 יַֽעַבְדֻ֣וךָ עַמִּ֑ים
וישתחו וְיִשְׁתַּחֲוּ֥וּ לְךָ֖ לְאֻמִּ֑ים
הֱוֵ֤ה גְבִיר֙ לְאַחֶ֔יךָ
וְיִשְׁתַּחֲוּ֥וּ לְךָ֖ בְּנֵ֣י אִמֶּ֑ךָ

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why do these blessings begin with "and"? (See the Hebrew of v. 28.)

RASHI in with him. **Like the smell of the fields that the LORD has blessed.** Fields that the Lord has blessed with a fragrant aroma. According to our Sages, this refers to an apple orchard.

28 May God give you. Literally, "*and* may God give you." May He give it to you over and over again. But the straightforward sense is that it is simply a conjunction. **Of the dew of heaven.** The midrash examines many different aspects of this phrase.

Since *elohim* ("God") refers to the aspect of justice, some take Isaac to be saying, "May He give it to you only if you are worthy of it." But to Esau he said, "your abode shall enjoy the fat of the earth" (v. 39)—whether you deserve it or not. Solomon learned from this distinction when he framed his prayer at the inauguration of the Temple. For faithful Israel he prayed, "Render to each man according to his ways as You know his heart to be" (1 Kings 8:39). But for the foreigners who lack faith he prayed, "oh, hear in Your heavenly abode and grant all that the foreigner asks You for" (1 Kings 8:43), whether they deserve it or not, so that no one can complain that You are prejudiced.

29 Your mother's sons. Compare what Jacob said to Judah: "your father's sons" (49:8). Jacob had sons by several mothers, but Isaac, who married only one woman, could

KIMHI **blessed.** This was not part of the blessing but an expression of his joyful state of mind, in which the Holy Spirit rested upon him and he blessed him. As NJPS recognizes, "See" (OJPS) is stylistic, not a command issued to a specific person.

28 May God give you of the dew of heaven. As much as you need. — He did not mention rain, for dew is always beneficial but that is not so of rain. **And the fat of the earth.** The מ of *mishman* is doing double duty, both as a noun prefix and as the preposition "of."

RASHBAM clothes were perfumed. **Like the smell of the fields that the LORD has blessed.** Fields full of "nard and saffron, fragrant reed and cinnamon" (Song 4:14). As R. Eleazar Kallir wrote of it in his liturgical poem accompanying the prayer for dew on the first day of Passover: "a field of blessing—when he smelled him, he blessed him with the gift of dew."

28 May God give you of the dew of heaven. A blessing like that of "the fields that the LORD has blessed" (v. 27).

IBN EZRA (Isa. 7:2). All three are hollow verbs. **Ah, the smell of my son.** Isaac is speaking to himself. The smell of the clothes made him think it was Esau just coming from the woods. For the clothes smelled like fresh blossoms. It may well have been Nisan, the first month of spring.

28 Of the dew of heaven and the fat of the earth. "Of" belongs with both phrases. The "fat" of the earth is not *shemen* but *mishman*, where the מ is part of the noun, not a preposition.

29 Your brothers. Rather, your "brethren" (OJPS), the sons of Abraham's concubines. **Your mother's sons.** Esau and his sons. **Cursed be they who curse you.** "Cursed" is singular; "cursed be each of them." So too in "the righteous are as confident as a lion" (Prov. 28:1) we are to take it

NAHMANIDES apple trees. **That the LORD has blessed.** That the Lord has blessed for my son, that he should be able to hunt successfully and that no harm come to him while doing so.

28 May God give you of the dew of heaven. This blessing is not literally a prayer that God give Esau dew (which falls everywhere). Had he asked for plenty of dew, or dew in its time—like "I will grant your rains in their season" (Lev. 26:4)—that would certainly be a blessing. But after blessing his endeavors as a hunter Isaac goes on to ask for additional blessing for him—the dew of heaven **and the fat of the earth, abundance of new grain and wine.** Or perhaps it is to be understood this way: "May God give you, of the dew of heaven and the fat of the earth, an abundance of new grain and wine" (ignoring, as does NJPS, the *and* of "and plenty of corn and wine" (OJPS). In my view, a "gift" from God would imply a gift that lasts forever, "as long as you live." He is requesting that Esau be given the fat of "the land" (of Israel), always be blessed to be "the fairest of all lands" (Ezek. 20:6). Ibn Ezra's comment, however, implies that this was not a gift of God, but that he blessed him with "some of" the dew of heaven and "some of" the fat of the earth (not necessarily the land of Israel), indeed holding something back (see Ibn Ezra's comment to "reserved" in v. 36). Indeed, as Isaac tells (the real) Esau in v. 39, "your abode shall enjoy the fat of the earth and the dew of heaven above"—hinting that his line would ultimately perish, but that for as long as he lived his lot would be a good one.

29 Cursed be they who curse you, blessed they who bless you. If Rashi's comment (which is taken from Genesis Rabbah) is correct, one might ask why the Holy One blessed Abraham by saying, "I will bless those who bless you and curse him that curses

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **28 May God give you of the dew of heaven.** The land of Canaan is given to my father's offspring and to mine, but rain falls here only twice a year; the rest of the time, the land needs dew (Hizkuni). "The dew of heaven" is a metaphor for divine providence (Abarbanel). **And the fat of the earth, abundance of new grain and wine.** Not every fertile land is suitable for growing wine grapes; some fertile lands may even be too fertile to produce grain. All this is obvious to one who studies nature carefully (Gersonides).

29 Let peoples serve you. The sons of Keturah (Bekhor Shor). **And nations bow to you.** The sons of Lot and Ishmael, all of whom were subservient to Isaac (Bekhor Shor).

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NJPS Cursed be they who curse you,
Blessed they who bless you."

30No sooner had Jacob left the presence of his father Isaac—after Isaac had finished blessing Jacob—than his brother Esau came back from his hunt. 31He too prepared a dish and brought it to his father. And he said to his father, "Let my father sit up and eat of his son's game, so that you may give me your innermost blessing." 32His father Isaac said to him, "Who are you?" And he said, "I am your son, Esau, your first-born!" 33Isaac was seized with very violent trembling. "Who was it then," he demanded, "that hunted game and brought it to me? Moreover, I ate of it before you came, and I blessed him; now

אֹרְרֶיךָ אָרוּר
וּמְבָרֲכֶיךָ בָּרוּךְ׃
30 וַיְהִי כַּאֲשֶׁר כִּלָּה יִצְחָק לְבָרֵךְ אֶת־יַעֲקֹב
וַיְהִי אַךְ יָצֹא יָצָא יַעֲקֹב מֵאֵת פְּנֵי יִצְחָק
אָבִיו וְעֵשָׂו אָחִיו בָּא מִצֵּידוֹ׃ 31 וַיַּעַשׂ
גַּם־הוּא מַטְעַמִּים וַיָּבֵא לְאָבִיו וַיֹּאמֶר
לְאָבִיו יָקֻם אָבִי וְיֹאכַל מִצֵּיד בְּנוֹ בַּעֲבוּר
תְּבָרֲכַנִי נַפְשֶׁךָ׃ 32 וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ יִצְחָק אָבִיו
מִי־אָתָּה וַיֹּאמֶר אֲנִי בִנְךָ בְכֹרְךָ עֵשָׂו׃
33 וַיֶּחֱרַד יִצְחָק חֲרָדָה גְּדֹלָה עַד־
מְאֹד וַיֹּאמֶר מִי־אֵפוֹא הוּא הַצָּד־צַיִד
וַיָּבֵא לִי וָאֹכַל מִכֹּל בְּטֶרֶם תָּבוֹא

OJPS Cursed be every one that curseth thee,
and blessed be every one that blesseth thee.

30And it came to pass, as soon as Isaac had made an end of blessing Jacob, and Jacob was yet scarce gone out from the presence of Isaac his father, that Esau his brother came in from his hunting. 31And he also made savory food, and brought it unto his father; and he said unto his father: "Let my father arise, and eat of his son's venison, that thy soul may bless me." 32And Isaac his father said unto him: "Who art thou?" And he said: "I am thy son, thy first-born, Esau." 33And Isaac trembled very exceedingly, and said: "Who then is he that hath taken venison, and brought it me, and I have eaten of all before thou camest, and have blessed him? yea, and he

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why was Isaac "seized with very violent trembling" (v. 33)? ✦ When Isaac asks "Who was it then?" he literally asks, "Who, *where* is he?" What did he mean by that?

RASHI say "your mother's sons." **Cursed be they who curse you, blessed they who bless you**. Compare what Balaam said: "Blessed are they who bless you, accursed they who curse you!" (Num. 24:9). The righteous start with suffering and end with tranquility, so those who curse them and grieve them are mentioned before those who bless them. That is why Isaac put the cursers first and the blessers last. But the wicked begin with tranquility and end with suffering, so Balaam reversed the two.

30 No sooner had Jacob left the presence of his father Isaac . . . than his brother Esau came back from his hunt. It is the double verb form of "Jacob left" that implies "no sooner"—this one left, and that one entered.

33 Isaac was seized with very violent trembling. More precisely, as Onkelos has it, "he was disturbed." But a midrash indeed says that he saw Gehenna open below him. **Who was it then?** "Then" is a compound word in Hebrew, with several different meanings. In our context, it means not only "Who was it?" but also "Where is he?" **I ate of it**. More precisely, "I ate of it all" (compare OJPS). I tasted in it all the tastes that I wanted to taste. **Now he must remain blessed**. Rather, "yea, and he shall be blessed" (OJPS). You

RASHBAM **30 No sooner had Jacob left**. The text is telling us the miracles that were done for Jacob. Had Esau arrived one moment sooner, Jacob would not have been blessed.

33 Isaac was seized with very violent trembling. Since he had found hair on Jacob's neck. **Who was it then?** "Then" is mere fancy language (like *alors* in French). **Now he must remain blessed!** Because he hurried to serve me. — And Isaac realized that he had done it at the urging of Rebekah, who recognized that he was the one who deserved the blessings.

IBN EZRA as "each of the righteous is." There are many more such cases. **Blessed they who bless you**. See the previous comment.

33 Who was it then? Rather, "who—where?" Who was it, and where is he? Note that "then/where" here is a compound word. **I blessed him**. Changing the *a* vowel under the ו from *qamatz* to *patah* would be enough to change this verb from past to future.

KIMHI **30 From his hunt**. NJPS translates with slightly more precision than OJPS.

33 Isaac was seized with very violent trembling. Rather, he "trembled very exceedingly" (OJPS) for Esau's sake, so that Esau would not think he had blessed Jacob deliberately and was mocking him. **I ate of it before you came, and I blessed him**. Had you come in the middle of the meal, I would have left his food and taken yours, and blessed you. **Now he must remain blessed**. Rather, "yea, and he shall be blessed" (OJPS). Having blessed him, I now confirm that that blessing was his. For I knew he was my son.

NAHMANIDES you" (12:3)? But in fact that poses no difficulty, for that blessing continues, "And all the families of the earth shall bless themselves by you." So there is blessing both at the beginning and at the end. Or it may have to do (as we have explained in our comments to that verse) with the fact that "those who bless" are many and "he that curses" is but one.

32 Who are you? When he said, "Let my father sit up" (v. 31), Isaac assumed it was Jacob, who (knowing that he had blessed Esau) had also brought some food and wanted a blessing. But Isaac wanted to make sure.

33 I ate of it before you came, and I blessed him; now he must remain blessed! This is not the kind of thing that one would expect someone who was "seized with very violent trembling" to say, certainly not after crying out, "Who was it that deceived me?" He would be expected to curse the person, not say "he must remain blessed." And Esau, upset as he is, would hardly believe that Jacob had deceived their father after hearing him deliberately confirm the blessing. I think the verb is a present tense, not a future. What Isaac was saying was this: "Whoever deceived me into giving him this blessing *is* blessed—no matter what I say or do." He realized that this blessing was given to Jacob by means of the Holy Spirit. That explains the "violent trembling"; he realized that the son he loved had lost

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **31 Let my father sit up**. He was napping after his meal (Hizkuni). **Cursed be they who curse you**. Many people do curse kings and princes when they do not get what they want (Sforno).

33 Who was it then? When *eyfo* ends with an א, it means "then"; when it ends with a ה, it means "where?" (Sforno). **Now he must remain blessed!** Rather, "now he will *also* be blessed"—with the blessing of Abraham to inherit the land. And indeed he gave him this blessing in 28:4 (Bekhor Shor). I already told him (in v. 29), "Cursed be they who curse you." So if I curse him, I curse myself (Hizkuni). Isaac knew that the one who called down the blessing was simply a vessel for transmitting it. Suppose a glazier puts in a window to let light into a dark building. When the glazier goes home, the sun continues to shine through it (Abarbanel).

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NJPS he must remain blessed!" [34]When Esau heard his father's words, he burst into wild and bitter sobbing, and said to his father, "Bless me too, Father!" [35]But he answered, "Your brother came with guile and took away your blessing." [36][Esau] said, "Was he, then, named Jacob that he might supplant me these two times? First he took away my birthright and now he has taken away my blessing!" And he added, "Have you not reserved a blessing for me?" [37]Isaac answered, saying to Esau, "But I have made him master over you: I have given him all his brothers for servants, and sustained him with grain and wine. What, then, can

וַאֲבָרֲכֵהוּ גַּם־בָּרוּךְ יִהְיֶה׃ 34 כִּשְׁמֹעַ עֵשָׂו
אֶת־דִּבְרֵי אָבִיו וַיִּצְעַק צְעָקָה גְּדֹלָה וּמָרָה
עַד־מְאֹד וַיֹּאמֶר לְאָבִיו בָּרְכֵנִי גַם־אֲנִי
אָבִי׃ 35 וַיֹּאמֶר בָּא אָחִיךָ בְּמִרְמָה וַיִּקַּח
בִּרְכָתֶךָ׃ 36 וַיֹּאמֶר הֲכִי קָרָא שְׁמוֹ יַעֲקֹב
וַיַּעְקְבֵנִי זֶה פַּעֲמַיִם אֶת־בְּכֹרָתִי לָקָח
וְהִנֵּה עַתָּה לָקַח בִּרְכָתִי וַיֹּאמֶר הֲלֹא־
אָצַלְתָּ לִּי בְּרָכָה׃ 37 וַיַּעַן יִצְחָק וַיֹּאמֶר
לְעֵשָׂו הֵן גְּבִיר שַׂמְתִּיו לָךְ וְאֶת־כָּל־אֶחָיו
נָתַתִּי לוֹ לַעֲבָדִים וְדָגָן וְתִירֹשׁ סְמַכְתִּיו

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ What is the sense in Esau's saying "Have you not reserved a blessing for me?" (v. 36) when he knew that Isaac had given away the blessing reserved for him? ✦ Why did Isaac respond by saying, "But I have made him master over you" (v. 37)? Why did he not tell him this as soon as Esau begged him, "Bless me too, Father!" (v. 34)? It was this, of course, that really prevented Isaac from blessing Esau too. ✦ Who are "all his brothers"? Esau was Jacob's only brother.

OJPS shall be blessed." [34]When Esau heard the words of his father, he cried with an exceeding great and bitter cry, and said unto his father: "Bless me, even me also, O my father." [35]And he said: "Thy brother came with guile, and hath taken away thy blessing." [36]And he said: "Is not he rightly named Jacob? for he hath supplanted me these two times: he took away my birthright; and, behold, now he hath taken away my blessing." And he said: "Hast thou not reserved a blessing for me?" [37]And Isaac answered and said unto Esau: "Behold, I have made him thy lord, and all his brethren have I given to him for servants; and with corn and wine have I sustained him; and what then shall I do

RASHI should not think that Jacob would not have gotten the blessings unless he had deceived his father. Isaac here agrees with the blessing and invokes it deliberately.

35 With guile. Rather, "cleverly."

36 Was he, then, named Jacob that he might supplant me? Rather, "Was he named Jacob because he would supplant me?" Says the Tanhuma: Why did Isaac tremble? He thought, "Perhaps some sin in me caused me to reverse them and bless the younger rather than the elder." Esau began to yell, "He has supplanted me twice!" Said his father, "What did he do to you?" He said, "He took my birthright." Isaac thought, "I was so afraid that I had transgressed! But I have blessed the first-born after all. So let him remain blessed." As for "supplant," Onkelos translates "lie in wait for me"; but some take it to mean "outsmart me." **[I] Have you not reserved a blessing for me?** For the verb, compare "He *drew* upon the spirit that was on him and put it upon the seventy elders" (Num. 11:25).

37 But I have made him master over you. This was the seventh blessing that Isaac gave Jacob, but here he names it first. He was explaining to Esau, "What is the point of my blessing you? Anything you would get would belong to him." **What, then, can I still do for you, my son?** Where can I find anything to do for you? **[J]**

[I] Our versions of Onkelos have the latter translation. **[J]** See Rashi's comment to "then" in v. 33.

RASHBAM **36 Was he, then, named Jacob?** "Wasn't he named Jacob because he grabbed my heel when we were born? So *I* was the first-born and he was just another son, and he should have gotten less than me—but now he will get twice as much!" This is a rhetorical question, like that of Laban in 29:15; see similarly the question of Admon in M. BB 9:1 about the laws of inheritance.

37 I have given him all his brothers for servants. And what a servant acquires, his master acquires.

IBN EZRA **35 Your brother came with guile.** He did not speak the truth.

36 Was he, then. In Hebrew, the question begins with "is it not that . . . ?" meaning, "is it not true that . . . ?" **Named Jacob.** Literally, "that [someone] named him Jacob." **Supplant me.** Rather, "cheat me." Compare "Jehu was acting with *guile*" (2 Kings 10:19). It may also mean "to act deviously," as in "Most *devious* is the heart" (Jer. 17:9), where "devious" is literally "crooked," the opposite of "straight." **Have you not reserved a blessing for me?** "Reserved" here is related to "I will *draw upon* the spirit that is on you" (Num. 11:17). It means "to keep something with oneself."

37 But I have made him master over you. By my blessing. **I have given him.** Verbally. **What, then.** Some do say that "then" is the correct translation of this latter word and that it is not a compound. **[F]**

[F] See Ibn Ezra's comment to "Who was it then?" (v. 33).

KIMHI **34 Bless me too, Father!** Rather, "Bless me! I also [am your son]" (compare OJPS).

35 Your brother came with guile. Making his hands seem hairy.

36 Have you not reserved a blessing for me? Literally, "Have you not *besided* a blessing for me?" Have you not kept another blessing beside you for me?

NAHMANIDES his blessing forever. For after first wondering "Who was it?" he understood that it had been Jacob. It could not be possible for his blessing to take effect on anyone but his own offspring.

37 I have given him all his brothers for servants. This is not the same as making him "master" over Esau; he might be a "lord" (OJPS) without his brothers being his servants, as when "Judah *became more powerful* than his brothers" (1 Chron. 5:2). Giving him his brothers for servants refers to "let your mother's sons bow to you" (v. 29), for "bowing" of this kind implies the bowing of a servant to his master: "Let peoples serve you, and nations bow to you" (also v. 29). As for it saying "all" his brothers, this again, as in v. 29, is in the plural to allude to all of Esau's descendants. (But see Ibn Ezra's comments to v. 29.)

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **35 Your brother came with guile and took away your blessing.** It is questionable whether the original blessing was given as prophecy or as a prayer. It obviously could not be a prophecy if Isaac can now say that Jacob took it with guile. But if it was a prayer, what would prevent him from praying for Esau too? I wish I knew! The blessing must somehow share elements of both prophecy and prayer (Gersonides).

36 Was he, then, named Jacob that he might supplant me these two times? Rather, "Was it his being named Jacob that caused him to . . ." (Sforno).

37 But I have made him master over you. Can you imagine that I would have done this deliberately if I had known who it was? Impossible! (Abarbanel).

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NJPS I still do for you, my son?" 38And Esau said to his father, "Have you but one blessing, Father? Bless me too, Father!" And Esau wept aloud. 39And his father Isaac answered, saying to him,

"See, your abode shall enjoy the fat of the earth
And the dew of heaven above.
40Yet by your sword you shall live,
And you shall serve your brother;
But when you grow restive,
You shall break his yoke from your neck."

OJPS for thee, my son?" 38And Esau said unto his father: "Hast thou but one blessing, my father? bless me, even me also, O my father." And Esau lifted up his voice, and wept. 39And Isaac his father answered and said unto him:

Behold, of the fat places of the earth shall be thy dwelling,
and of the dew of heaven from above;
40And by thy sword shalt thou live,
and thou shalt serve thy brother;
and it shall come to pass when thou shalt break loose,
that thou shalt shake his yoke from off thy neck.

וּלְכָה אִפּוֹא מָה אֶעֱשֶׂה בְּנִי׃ 38 וַיַּ֨עַן עֵשָׂ֜ו אֶל־אָבִ֗יו הַבְרָכָ֤ה אַחַת֙ הִוא־לְךָ֣ אָבִ֔י בָּרֲכֵ֥נִי גַם־אֲנִ֖י אָבִ֑י וַיִּשָּׂ֥א עֵשָׂ֛ו קֹל֖וֹ וַיֵּֽבְךְּ׃
39 וַיַּ֥עַן יִצְחָ֛ק אָבִ֖יו וַיֹּ֣אמֶר אֵלָ֑יו
הִנֵּ֤ה מִשְׁמַנֵּי֙ הָאָ֣רֶץ יִהְיֶ֔ה מוֹשָׁבֶ֔ךָ
וּמִטַּ֥ל הַשָּׁמַ֖יִם מֵֽעָל׃
40 *וְעַל־חַרְבְּךָ֥ תִחְיֶ֖ה
וְאֶת־אָחִ֣יךָ תַּעֲבֹ֑ד
וְהָיָה֙ כַּאֲשֶׁ֣ר תָּרִ֔יד
וּפָרַקְתָּ֥ עֻלּ֖וֹ מֵעַ֥ל צַוָּארֶֽךָ׃

למדינחאי חצי הספר בפסוקים *v. 40.*

RASHI **39 Your abode shall enjoy the fat of the earth.** This is Magna Graecia—southern Italy.

40 But when you grow restive. Rather, "distraught." Compare "I am *distraught* with complaint" (Ps. 55:3). Isaac is saying: When Israel transgresses the Torah, you will have an opportunity to start complaining about the blessings he took, and **you shall break his yoke from your neck.**

RASHBAM **40 Yet by your sword you shall live.** As has been your occupation—hunting animals with your weapons. **But when you grow restive.** See Ps. 55:3. When he works you so ruthlessly that you cannot stand it any longer, **you shall break his yoke from your neck.**

KIMHI **39 Your abode.** Mount Seir. **The fat of the earth and the dew of heaven above.** This blessing can certainly be given to both of you, to him for his land and to you for yours.

40 Yet by your sword you shall live. It is "and," not "yet" (see OJPS). This was Esau's special blessing. **And you shall serve your brother.** This too was a blessing; it would be better for him to serve his brother than to serve others. **You shall break his yoke from your neck.** And serve him no longer—on account of his transgression.

IBN EZRA **40 When you grow restive.** Rather, "when you are to rule," though this is from רידד and the usual root is רדה. Some interpret it along the lines of the same verb in Ps. 55:3, according to which it would mean here, "when you *complain* to the Lord and He takes pity on you." **You shall break his yoke from your neck.** It is a stronger word than "break"; compare *"splitting* mountains and shattering rocks" (1 Kings 19:11). When Eli "broke his *neck* and died" (1 Sam. 4:18), it is actually "neck" that is related to our word.

Now, there are some difficult questions involved in these blessings. If the blessing was a prophecy, how could he not know whom he was blessing? The great minds of the generation claim that when Jacob arrived God told Isaac, "Bless this one." But if that were true Isaac would have told Esau so. And why would he have blessed Esau too just because he wept? Others say Isaac was not a prophet and his blessing was not performative, but they are also wrong. We are told explicitly that "the LORD appeared to him" (26:2 and 26:24). David too tells us that when the Holy One reproved kings on the Patriarchs' account, He told them, "Do not touch My anointed ones; do not harm My *prophets*" (1 Chron. 16:22). Still others ask what difference it makes to whom Isaac spoke his words, when he was clearly thinking about Esau. But in fact he was in doubt: "The voice is the voice of Jacob, yet the hands are the hands of Esau" (v. 22). He blessed whichever one of them it was. After all, both of them were his sons. Then there are some who question how the Holy One could say, "the older shall serve the younger" (25:23), and how Isaac himself could announce, as he does here, "you shall serve your brother," when this did not actually ever happen. Saadia answered this question, or rather he deflected it with a broken reed, claiming that it *did* happen, when Esau "went to another land because of his brother Jacob" (36:6). But he is forgetting that Jacob "bowed low to the ground seven times until he was near his brother" (33:3). What I think is that a prophet's blessing is a kind of prayer. The Holy One did indeed heed this prayer, since this blessing was really about their offspring.

Some who have not yet awoken from the sleep of folly think that we are currently in exile in "Edom," but that is not so. Edom was a country that was once under Judean control, until "Edom fell away from Judah" (2 Kings 8:22). Remember that Joab "killed off every male in Edom" (1 Kings 11:15). That is why the Edomites cried out, on the day of Jerusalem's fall, "Strip her, strip her to her very

NAHMANIDES **39 See, your abode shall enjoy the fat of the earth and the dew of heaven above.** "See" is to indicate: This is something I *can* give you; there is enough of these for both of you. But as for rulership, that is his, and you must serve him. — He also did not give Esau "abundance of new grain and wine" (v. 28), as he had to Jacob. For he wished to give the original blessing the respect it deserved. He will later pray for Jacob, "May He grant the blessing of Abraham to you and your offspring, that you may possess the land where you are sojourning, which God assigned to Abraham" (28:4), so the "abundance of new grain and wine" would be that of Abraham's gift, the land of Canaan. Esau would have to enjoy "the fat of the earth and the dew of heaven above" somewhere else.

40 By your sword you shall live. This is not a blessing that he would get his sustenance only from the spoils of the enemies he killed in battle; after all, "the fat of the earth and the dew of heaven above" (v. 39) would provide him with sustenance. He is blessing him that he would be able to "live," winning all his battles and not being killed by the sword of his enemy. This is the context for what follows. **And you shall serve your brother.** You shall not have mastery over him. **But when you grow restive.** Under his provocation. **You shall break his yoke from your neck.** All this is mentioned to caution Israel not to provoke Edom so much that they do harm to them: "You will be passing

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **38 Have you but one blessing, Father?** Rather, "That blessing, Father"—the covenant with Abraham—"I know you have only one of" (Abarbanel). **Bless me too, Father!** With the other blessings, which will not lessen any of the extra blessings that Jacob received (Abarbanel). I am sure you did not mean for me to have everything and him to have nothing (Sforno).

40 By your sword you shall live. If you become a warrior you shall break his yoke; if you become a laborer you will never be free of him, or of someone (Sforno).

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NJPS [41]Now Esau harbored a grudge against Jacob because of the blessing which his father had given him, and Esau said to himself, "Let but the mourning period of my father come, and I will kill my brother Jacob." [42]When the words of her older son Esau were reported to Rebekah, she sent for her younger son Jacob and said to him, "Your brother Esau is consoling himself by planning to kill you.

41 וַיִּשְׂטֹם עֵשָׂו אֶת־יַעֲקֹב עַל־הַבְּרָכָה
אֲשֶׁר בֵּרְכוֹ אָבִיו וַיֹּאמֶר עֵשָׂו בְּלִבּוֹ
יִקְרְבוּ יְמֵי אֵבֶל אָבִי וְאַהַרְגָה אֶת־יַעֲקֹב
אָחִי׃ 42 וַיֻּגַּד לְרִבְקָה אֶת־דִּבְרֵי עֵשָׂו בְּנָהּ
הַגָּדֹל וַתִּשְׁלַח וַתִּקְרָא לְיַעֲקֹב בְּנָהּ
הַקָּטֹן וַתֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו הִנֵּה עֵשָׂו אָחִיךָ

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why are we told that Esau harbored a grudge against Jacob "because of the blessing which his father had given him" (v. 41) rather than "because he had come with guile and taken away his blessing"? ✦ Why must v. 42 specifically mention that Esau was her older son and Jacob her younger son?

OJPS [41]And Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing wherewith his father blessed him. And Esau said in his heart: "Let the days of mourning for my father be at hand; then will I slay my brother Jacob." [42]And the words of Esau her elder son were told to Rebekah; and she sent and called Jacob her younger son, and said unto him: "Behold, thy brother Esau, as touching thee, doth comfort himself,

RASHI **41 Let but the mourning period of my father come.** He did not want to hurt his father. But the midrash takes this expression a number of different ways. **[K]**

42 The words of her older son Esau were reported to Rebekah. Esau had said them "in his heart" (OJPS, v. 41), but they were reported to Rebekah by means of the Holy Spirit. **Your brother Esau is consoling himself.** Rather, he is "changing his mind about you," giving up his brotherly feelings, acting as if he were not related to you, and **planning to kill you.** But a midrash says: He has already "drunk the cup of comfort" for you; in his eyes you are as good as dead. But the straightforward sense is: He will console himself for losing the blessings by killing you.

[K] Rashi does not want to say so, but one such midrash implies that Isaac's "mourning period" will be when he mourns the loss of his son Jacob.

KIMHI **41 Let but the mourning period of my father come.** My father is close to death. Once we have mourned him, I will kill my brother Jacob. I will not do it while my father is alive in order not to cause pain to my father in his old age.

42 The words of her older son Esau were reported to Rebekah. How, if he said them only "in his heart" (OJPS, v. 41)? Perhaps prophetically, since our tradition says she was a prophet; or perhaps when he said them to himself he also unintentionally said them out loud. **Your brother Esau is consoling himself by planning to kill you.** Rather, "he is consoling himself about your death—for he is planning to kill you." Or perhaps "he is consoling himself about his own death on your account." If he can kill you, he will not care if he himself is killed afterward.

NAHMANIDES through the territory of your kinsmen, the descendants of Esau, who live in Seir. Though they will be afraid of you, be very careful not to provoke them. For I will not give you of their land so much as a foot can tread on; I have given the hill country of Seir as a possession to Esau" (Deut. 2:4–5). The Sages have this to say about the time when Joab and the Israelites "stayed there for six months until he had killed off every male in Edom" (1 Kings 11:16): The Holy One punished David by eliminating these six months from his kingship. Compare 1 Kings 2:11 to 2 Sam. 5:5.

42 When the words of her older son Esau were reported to Rebekah. Ibn Ezra's explanation is unnecessary. Saying something "in one's heart" (see OJPS to v. 41) is an idiom for making a decision, even if one says it out loud. See Ps. 12:3, where "they talk with duplicity" is literally "they speak with a heart and a heart," "heart" being a metaphor for the will. Thus when the fighting men came to Hebron "with whole heart" to make David king (1 Chron. 12:39), it means that they had all agreed, which they certainly did by speaking with each other. See 24:45, where "I had scarcely finished praying in my heart" means "I had scarcely finished deciding what I would ask." So v. 41 is telling us what Esau had decided. But if Rashi's explanation (which comes from Genesis Rabbah) is correct, then Esau did indeed say what he said only in his thoughts. In any case, Esau would do nothing while Isaac was still alive, whether out of a desire not to grieve him or out of fear that he might turn his blessing into a curse. Rebekah was afraid that the old man might die suddenly, after which Esau would kill Jacob, or perhaps she feared that he would kill him even while Isaac was still alive. **She sent for her younger son.** He was somewhere else, not in the tent of his father and mother; he was hiding from Esau, who was calling out for him. Either he was embarrassed or he was afraid. **Your brother Esau is consoling himself by planning to kill you.** "Consoling himself" for losing the blessings, according to Rashi's comment, but the straightforward sense is "he is consoling himself *with regard to* you." But Onkelos suggests that Esau was pretending to be

IBN EZRA foundations!" (Ps. 137:7); that cry was even more painful to the Israelites than the destruction. See also Lam. 4:21, "Rejoice and exult, Fair Edom," and Obadiah's question to them, "How could you gloat over the people of Judah on that day of ruin?" (Obad. 1:12). John Hyrcanus made the Idumeans (as the Edomites were by then called) guardians of the city of Jerusalem and brought them into the covenant by circumcision. In Agrippa II's time, when Jerusalem was conquered, Idumean brigades came to the aid of Judea. But the nation that exiled us **[G]** is descended from the Kittim; see how Onkelos translates that term at Num. 24:24. It is the same as the kingdom of Greece, the "fourth beast" of Dan. 7:7. There were a very few of them who followed the new faith, **[H]** and when it became the state religion in the time of Constantine, who put an image of the crucified one on his flag, **[I]** there was hardly anyone in the whole world who believed it but for a few Edomites. Similarly the inhabitants of Egypt and Sheba and Elam are all called Ishmaelites today even though next to no one in those countries is really a descendant of Ishmael.

41 When the words of her older son Esau were reported to Rebekah. He said them "to himself" (v. 41), but perhaps he also told one of his companions. Some say she was told this by prophecy, but the other explanation is more plausible.

42 Consoling himself by planning. "By planning" is not in the text; this is Saadia's interpretation, based on Arabic, of the word that means "consoling himself."

[G] Rome, which is referred to in rabbinic sources by the code name "Edom." **[H]** Christianity. **[I]** This clause is missing from our standard texts because it was removed by Christian censors.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **41 Let but the mourning period of my father come, and I will kill my brother Jacob.** Rather, "The mourning period will soon come to my father, for I will kill my brother Jacob. He took my blessing *and* my gift, and I cannot comfort myself in any way except by killing him." If Esau was really waiting for Isaac to die, Jacob would not have had to run away before his father died. In the end, he actually *returned* before Isaac died (Bekhor Shor). Esau does not say "let the mourning period come," but "let it be at hand" (compare OJPS). After Isaac's death, Jacob might flee. But when the moment of death was at hand, he would certainly not leave; moreover, everyone would be so preoccupied with Isaac's imminent death that it would be easy to carry out the murder (Abarbanel).

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NJPS planning to kill you. 43Now, my son, listen to me. Flee at once to Haran, to my brother Laban. 44Stay with him a while, until your brother's fury subsides—45until your brother's anger against you subsides—and he forgets what you have done to him. Then I will fetch you from there. Let me not lose you both in one day!"

46Rebekah said to Isaac, "I am disgusted with my life because of the Hittite women. If Jacob marries a Hittite woman like these, from among the native women, what good will life be to me?" 28 1So Isaac sent for Jacob and blessed him. He instructed him, saying, "You shall not take a wife from among the Canaanite women. 2Up, go to Paddan-aram, to the house of Bethuel, your mother's father, and take a wife there from among the daughters of Laban, your mother's brother, 3May El Shaddai bless you, make you fertile and numerous, so that you become an assembly

OJPS purposing to kill thee. 43Now therefore, my son, hearken to my voice; and arise, flee thou to Laban my brother to Haran; 44and tarry with him a few days, until thy brother's fury turn away; 45until thy brother's anger turn away from thee, and he forget that which thou hast done to him; then I will send, and fetch thee from thence; why should I be bereaved of you both in one day?"

46And Rebekah said to Isaac: "I am weary of my life because of the daughters of Heth. If Jacob take a wife of the daughters of Heth, such as these, of the daughters of the land, what good shall my life do me?" 28 1And Isaac called Jacob, and blessed him, and charged him, and said unto him: "Thou shalt not take a wife of the daughters of Canaan. 2Arise, go to Paddan-aram, to the house of Bethuel thy mother's father; and take thee a wife from thence of the daughters of Laban thy mother's brother. 3And God Almighty bless thee, and make thee fruitful, and multiply thee, that thou mayest be

מִתְנַחֵם לְךָ לְהָרְגֶךָ׃ 43 וְעַתָּה בְנִי שְׁמַע בְּקֹלִי וְקוּם בְּרַח־לְךָ אֶל־לָבָן אָחִי חָרָנָה׃ 44 וְיָשַׁבְתָּ עִמּוֹ יָמִים אֲחָדִים עַד אֲשֶׁר־ תָּשׁוּב חֲמַת אָחִיךָ׃ 45 עַד־שׁוּב אַף־אָחִיךָ מִמְּךָ וְשָׁכַח אֵת אֲשֶׁר־עָשִׂיתָ לּוֹ וְשָׁלַחְתִּי וּלְקָחְתִּיךָ מִשָּׁם לָמָּה אֶשְׁכַּל גַּם־שְׁנֵיכֶם יוֹם אֶחָד׃

46 וַתֹּאמֶר רִבְקָה אֶל־יִצְחָק קַצְתִּי* בְחַיַּי מִפְּנֵי בְּנוֹת חֵת אִם־לֹקֵחַ יַעֲקֹב אִשָּׁה מִבְּנוֹת־חֵת כָּאֵלֶּה מִבְּנוֹת הָאָרֶץ לָמָּה לִי חַיִּים׃ כח 1 וַיִּקְרָא יִצְחָק אֶל־ יַעֲקֹב וַיְבָרֶךְ אֹתוֹ וַיְצַוֵּהוּ וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ לֹא־תִקַּח אִשָּׁה מִבְּנוֹת כְּנָעַן׃ 2 קוּם לֵךְ פַּדֶּנָה אֲרָם בֵּיתָה בְתוּאֵל אֲבִי אִמֶּךָ וְקַח־לְךָ מִשָּׁם אִשָּׁה מִבְּנוֹת לָבָן אֲחִי אִמֶּךָ׃ 3 וְאֵל שַׁדַּי יְבָרֵךְ אֹתְךָ וְיַפְרְךָ

ק׳ זעירא לפי נוסחים מקובלים *v. 46.*

RASHI **44 A while**. Literally, "a few days" (OJPS).

45 Let me not lose you. Those who bury their children are called "bereft" (compare OJPS). Jacob uses the same verb: "As for me, if I am to be *bereaved*, I shall be *bereaved*" (43:14). **Both in one day**. "If he attacks you and you kill him, his sons will kill you." The Holy Spirit was sprinkled over her and she prophesied that they would both die on the same day; see B. Sot. 13a. **[L]**

46 I am disgusted with my life. NJPS translates correctly.

28:3 May El Shaddai bless you. The God (*el*) *she-dai*, "who has enough" for anyone He cares to bless.

[L] The story is told there that Esau tried to prevent Jacob's being buried in the cave of Machpelah; Jacob's grandson Hushim responded by beating his brains out.

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why does Rebekah say, "until your brother's fury subsides" (v. 44), and immediately repeat "until your brother's anger against you subsides" (v. 45)? ✦ How can Rebekah say, "and he forgets what you have done to him," pinning the guilt on Jacob when she herself was responsible? ✦ What did she mean by saying, "Let me not lose you both in one day!"? Even if Esau were to kill Jacob, who would kill Esau? ✦ Why did Rebekah distract Isaac with talk about Jacob marrying a Hittite woman (v. 46)? Why didn't she just tell Isaac she was afraid Esau might kill Jacob? Jacob was worried about being killed, not about getting married!

✦ Once Rebekah told Jacob, "Flee at once to Haran, to my brother Laban" (27:43), why did Isaac change this to say, "Up, go to Paddan-aram, to the house of *Bethuel*, your mother's father" (v. 2)?

KIMHI **43 Flee at once to Haran, to my brother Laban**. She had heard that he had moved there from Ur.

45 Let me not lose you both in one day! Which I will, if you don't run away!

46 I am disgusted with my life because of the Hittite women. Whom Esau married. **If Jacob marries a Hittite woman . . . what good will life be to me?** And he can't remain unmarried much longer—he is already over 40.

28:1 So Isaac sent for Jacob and blessed him. In vv. 3–4.

2 Up. That is, "get a move on."

RASHBAM **45 Let me not lose you both in one day!** For if he kills you, he will also be killed, by your blood avengers.

46 If Jacob marries a Hittite woman like these. Rebekah was scheming to get Jacob away from his brother. She did not let on to Isaac that she was doing this because of the grudge Esau was harboring.

IBN EZRA **44 A while**. Literally, "a few days" (OJPS), but "days" is idiomatic for "a year"; compare "the redemption period shall be *a year*" (Lev. 25:29). She is telling him to stay there for a few years. The Hebrew is more literally calling them "ones" years, that is, a number of years that could be expressed in the "ones" column—fewer than 10.

45 Let me not lose you both in one day! She was afraid they would kill each other, or that if Esau killed Jacob someone else would kill him. There is a midrash that they did in fact both die on the same day.

46 I am disgusted with my life. The verb *kutz* means the same as the reverse, *tzuk*.

NAHMANIDES "comforted," that is, reconciled to what had happened with the blessings, as if he no longer cared. Really, however, he would lie in wait for Jacob once he let down his guard. (Onkelos is translating here in accordance with the plot but not with the language.)

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **44 A while**. "Days" (see OJPS) is idiomatic Biblical Hebrew for "a year"; our phrase means "one year" (Hizkuni).

45 Let me not lose you both in one day! Your father and you (Hizkuni).

46 I am disgusted with my life. The ק of קצתי ("I am disgusted") is to be written unusually small (Masorah). **If Jacob marries a Hittite woman like these, from among the native women, what good will life be to me?** If you don't warn him, he will keep pestering us to let him stay here and marry a woman from a powerful Canaanite family, to protect himself from Esau (Hizkuni).

28:3 May El Shaddai bless you, make you fertile and numerous. Rather, "bless you" with wealth, "make you fertile" with children, and "multiply" you (see OJPS) in rank (Sforno).

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NJPS of peoples. [4]May He grant the blessing of Abraham to you and your offspring, that you may possess the land where you are sojourning, which God assigned to Abraham."

[5]Then Isaac sent Jacob off, and he went to Paddan-aram, to Laban the son of Bethuel the Aramean, the brother of Rebekah, mother of Jacob and Esau.

[6]When Esau saw that Isaac had blessed Jacob and sent him off to Paddan-aram to take a wife from there, charging him, as he blessed him, "You shall not take a wife from among the Canaanite women," [7]and that Jacob had obeyed his father and mother and gone to Paddan-aram, [8]Esau realized that the Canaanite women displeased his father Isaac. [9]So Esau went to

OJPS a congregation of peoples; [4]and give thee the blessing of Abraham, to thee, and to thy seed with thee; that thou mayest inherit the land of thy sojournings, which God gave unto Abraham."

[5]And Isaac sent away Jacob; and he went to Paddan-aram unto Laban, son of Bethuel the Aramean, the brother of Rebekah, Jacob's and Esau's mother.

[6]Now Esau saw that Isaac had blessed Jacob and sent him away to Paddan-aram, to take him a wife from thence; and that as he blessed him he gave him a charge, saying: "Thou shalt not take a wife of the daughters of Canaan"; [7]and that Jacob hearkened to his father and his mother, and was gone to Paddan-aram; [8]and Esau saw that the daughters of Canaan pleased not Isaac his father; [9]so Esau went unto

וְיִרָבֶּךָ וְהָיִיתָ לִקְהַל עַמִּים׃ 4 וְיִתֶּן־לְךָ אֶת־בִּרְכַּת אַבְרָהָם לְךָ וּלְזַרְעֲךָ אִתָּךְ לְרִשְׁתְּךָ אֶת־אֶרֶץ מְגֻרֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר־נָתַן אֱלֹהִים לְאַבְרָהָם׃ שביעי

5 וַיְשַׁלַּח יִצְחָק אֶת־יַעֲקֹב וַיֵּלֶךְ פַּדֶּנָה אֲרָם אֶל־לָבָן בֶּן־בְּתוּאֵל הָאֲרַמִּי אֲחִי רִבְקָה אֵם יַעֲקֹב וְעֵשָׂו׃

6 וַיַּרְא עֵשָׂו כִּי־בֵרַךְ יִצְחָק אֶת־יַעֲקֹב וְשִׁלַּח אֹתוֹ פַּדֶּנָה אֲרָם לָקַחַת־לוֹ מִשָּׁם אִשָּׁה בְּבָרְכוֹ אֹתוֹ וַיְצַו עָלָיו לֵאמֹר לֹא־תִקַּח אִשָּׁה מִבְּנוֹת כְּנָעַן׃ 7 וַיִּשְׁמַע ✦ מפטיר יַעֲקֹב אֶל־אָבִיו וְאֶל־אִמּוֹ וַיֵּלֶךְ פַּדֶּנָה אֲרָם׃ 8 וַיַּרְא עֵשָׂו כִּי רָעוֹת בְּנוֹת כְּנָעַן בְּעֵינֵי יִצְחָק אָבִיו׃ 9 וַיֵּלֶךְ עֵשָׂו אֶל־

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ When Jacob actually left, why are we told that "he went to Paddan-aram, to Laban the son of Bethuel the Aramean" (v. 5), following his mother's instructions rather than his father's? ✦ Why must we be told that Laban was "the brother of Rebekah" and that Rebekah was the "mother of Jacob and Esau"? Don't we already know all this? ✦ Why must v. 6 tell us that "Isaac had blessed Jacob" and repeat a second time that "he blessed him"? ✦ Why are we told a second time that Jacob had "gone to Paddan-aram" (v. 7)? ✦ Wasn't Isaac's saying "You shall not take a wife from among the Canaanite women" (v. 6) enough in itself to make it obvious to Esau that "Canaanite women displeased his father Isaac" (v. 8)? ✦ Why are we told that Isaac did not like Canaanite women when according to 27:46 it was really Rebekah who cared more about this?

RASHI **4 May He grant the blessing of Abraham to you**. "I will make of you a great nation" (12:2) and "All the nations of the earth shall bless themselves by your descendants" (22:18). May He grant that those blessings are said of you, too. May that nation, and those blessed descendants, come from you.

5 Mother of Jacob and Esau. I have no idea what calling her this is supposed to teach us.

9 In addition to the wives he had. He added wickedness on top of wickedness, for

KIMHI **4 May He grant the blessing of Abraham to you**. For you are my special offspring, as I was my father's.

5 And he went to Paddan-aram. Taking with him enough to pay his expenses as far as Haran. His father reassured him that once he reached Laban he would not need anything. **The brother of Rebekah**. Since Laban was his uncle, Jacob had a good excuse to go there. **Mother of Jacob and Esau**. Putting Jacob first, for she was really his mother, and she loved him more than Esau. It was out of compassion for him that she sent him to her brother. Even though she loved Esau, she did not love him as much as she loved Jacob—and her relatives back in Paddan-aram knew it.

RASHBAM **28:4 That you may possess the land where you are sojourning**. By not marrying a Canaanite woman, as Abraham instructed Isaac—for they were slaves.

6 When Esau saw that Isaac had blessed Jacob. With these new blessings in vv. 3–4, accompanied by the instruction not to marry a Canaanite woman. Esau realized, "These Canaanite women I married have cost me the blessing of Abraham!" So he married Ishmael's daughter, who was of the family of Abraham. He thought, "Perhaps now I will qualify for Abraham's inheritance."

9 Sister of Nebaioth. She is called this because Nebaioth was Ishmael's first-born. Compare "Miriam the prophetess, Aaron's sister" (Exod. 15:20); Aaron, remember, was born before Moses. But when Moses and

IBN EZRA **28:9 Mahalath the daughter of Ishmael**. She is the same woman as "Basemath daughter of Ishmael" (36:3), just as Jethro (in my opinion) is the same as

6 When Esau saw that Isaac had blessed Jacob. That is, when he "realized" it. Sight is the most important of the senses and can be used metaphorically for all of them, as it can for "seeing" something in one's heart. **And sent him off to Paddan-aram to take a wife from there**. They did not noise it about that he was running away from Esau.

8 Esau realized that the Canaanite women displeased his father Isaac. He must have already realized this when he married them, for his father certainly complained about it. But Isaac did not make a big point of it, since he knew that Esau was not the special son.

NAHMANIDES **28:5 The brother of Rebekah, mother of Jacob and Esau**. Isaac, after all, had instructed Jacob to get a wife "from among the daughters of Laban, your mother's brother" (v. 2). Our phrase is reminding us that Laban was also Esau's "mother's brother." Isaac should have given the same command to Esau, but he gave it only to Jacob because he knew that Abraham's blessing belonged only to Jacob and his offspring. All the same, Esau heard what Jacob had been commanded and wanted to heed his father's wishes. But he did not do what he ought to have done, which was to marry one of Laban's daughters, even though Laban was *his* mother's brother as much as he was Jacob's.

9 In addition to the wives he had. Rather than divorcing them, which shows that he was more interested in his own lust than in following his father's wishes.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **5 Rebekah, mother of Jacob and Esau**. How many Rebekahs there were! But Laban was the brother of this particular one (Bekhor Shor).

6 When Esau saw that Isaac had blessed Jacob and sent him off to Paddan-aram to take a wife from there. So all this with Esau took place after Jacob had fled. The text is settling for this little bit of information about Esau before going on to recount the longer story about Jacob (Bekhor Shor).

9 So Esau went to Ishmael. The straightforward sense must be that he went to the family of Ishmael, who had passed away by this

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NJPS Ishmael and took to wife, in addition to the wives he had, Mahalath the daughter of Ishmael son of Abraham, sister of Nebaioth.

OJPS Ishmael, and took unto the wives that he had Mahalath the daughter of Ishmael Abraham's son, the sister of Nebaioth, to be his wife.

יִשְׁמָעֵאל וַיִּקַּח אֶת־מָחֲלַת | בַּת־יִשְׁמָעֵאל
בֶּן־אַבְרָהָם אֲחֹות נְבָיוֹת עַל־נָשָׁיו לוֹ
לְאִשָּׁה׃ ס

RASHI he did not divorce the previous wives. **Sister of Nebaioth.** Since she is "the daughter of Ishmael," don't I know that she is the sister of Nebaioth? But we learn that Ishmael died after promising her to Esau, but before they were married. It was her brother Nebaioth who married her off. We learn further that Jacob was 63 years old when this happened. Ishmael was 74 when Jacob was born, since he was 14 years older than Isaac, and Isaac was 60 when the twins were born. According to 25:17, Ishmael lived to the age of 137, when Jacob was 63. So Jacob must have hid out in the house of Eber for 14 years before going to Haran. Now, Joseph was born after Jacob had lived in Haran for 14 years: "I served you fourteen years for your two daughters, and six years for your flocks" (31:41), and we know from 30:25–34 that the six years for the flocks began with Joseph's birth. "Joseph was thirty years old" (41:46) when he began to rule over Egypt, and it was a further nine years before Jacob came down there: the seven years of plenty plus two of the years of famine. At that point, Jacob told Pharaoh, "The years of my sojourn [on earth] are one hundred and thirty" (47:9). Do the math: 14 years before Joseph was born, plus 30, plus 9, add up to 53, and when Jacob left his father's home he was 63. But that is only 116, leaving 14 years unaccounted for. So after getting the blessings he obviously hid out in the house of Eber for 14 years. But he was not punished for them; he was punished only for the 22 years during which he failed to honor his father—20 years in Haran, plus 2 years on the journey. This is the same length of time Joseph was parted from *his* father. For he was taken to Egypt at age 17, and when Jacob got there Joseph was 39. The Sages derive from 33:17, "he built a house for himself and made booths for his cattle," that Jacob spent 18 months on the journey home, since a house is built for the winter and a booth for protection from the summer sun. But Jacob built "booths"—one for each of the two summers he must have spent there. **[M]** Anyway, he learned Torah from Eber for 14 years and was not punished for failing to honor his father during the time he spent learning. So Joseph was separated from him only for 22 years—measure for measure. **[N]**

RASHBAM Aaron are mentioned together, the text calls her "their sister Miriam" (Num. 26:59). Similarly, "Lotan's sister was Timna" (36:22), for Lotan was the oldest of her brothers (see 36:20).

IBN EZRA Hobab of Num. 10:29. **Sister of Nebaioth.** Who was obviously the most highly respected of all the brothers. Or perhaps Ishmael had many wives, and Mahalath was the sister of Nebaioth.

[M] Rashi's source on B. Meg. 17a and his comment there add that Jacob spent a further six months offering sacrifice at Bethel. **[N]** This is identified in our texts as coming from "an old version of Rashi."

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS time. Jacob lived 147 years; if you figure out the chronology of his life, you can see that he must have been 77 when he got to Haran. But Ishmael died when Jacob was just 63 (Bekhor Shor).

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VA-YETSE'

ויצא

NJPS [10]Jacob left Beer-sheba, and set out for Haran. [11]He came upon a certain place and stopped there for the night, for the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of that place, he put it under his head and lay

OJPS [10]And Jacob went out from Beer-sheba, and went toward Haran. [11]And he lighted upon the place, and tarried there all night, because the sun was set; and he took one of the stones of the place, and put it under his head, and lay down in that

10 וַיֵּצֵא יַעֲקֹב מִבְּאֵר שָׁבַע וַיֵּלֶךְ חָרָנָה׃
11 וַיִּפְגַּע בַּמָּקוֹם וַיָּלֶן שָׁם כִּי־בָא הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ
וַיִּקַּח מֵאַבְנֵי הַמָּקוֹם וַיָּשֶׂם מְרַאֲשֹׁתָיו

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why, when Jacob "came upon a certain place" (v. 11), is the word "place" unnaturally repeated twice more in that same verse?

RASHI **10 Jacob left Beer-sheba.** When "Esau saw that Isaac had blessed Jacob and sent him off to Paddan-aram to take a wife from there" (v. 6), the text digressed to tell how "Esau went to Ishmael" (v. 9) and took a wife from his family. Having finished that episode, the text returns to the previous thread. **And set out for Haran.** There was no need to tell us anything but that he "set out for Haran." Why must we be told also that he "left Beer-sheba"? It teaches us that when a righteous man departs a place, people take note. For when a city has a righteous man in it, he is its majesty, he is its glory, he is its shining light. When he departs, its majesty departs, its glory departs, its shining light departs. So too Naomi took Ruth and "left the place where she had been living" (Ruth 1:7).

11 He came upon a certain place. The text actually says that he came upon "*the* place" (OJPS), pointing to a place mentioned elsewhere in the text. It was Mount Moriah: "Abraham looked up and saw *the place* from afar" (22:4). "Came upon" is the correct translation; see Josh. 16:7 and 19:11, where a boundary "touches on" a particular place. But our Sages note that the word is used elsewhere for prayer, as when the Holy One tells Jeremiah, "do not pray for this people, do not raise a cry of prayer on their behalf, do not *plead* with Me" (Jer. 7:16). In our passage, the implication is that Jacob created the evening prayers. He actually "went to Haran" (as the phrase in v. 10 might be understood) but then realized that he ought to have prayed when he passed through the place where his ancestors had prayed. At once, two places on earth folded together for him so that all he had to do was step from Haran back to Mount Moriah. All this is explained on B. Hul. 91b. **And stopped there for the night, for the sun had set.** It might more naturally have said, "and the sun set, so he stopped there for the night." We learn that the sun set all of a sudden, not at its natural time, so that he would spend the night there. **Taking one of the stones.** More precisely, "*some* of the stones." **He put it under his head.** Rather, "he put them *at* his head," curving around his head like a pipe, being afraid of the wild animals. Immediately the stones began to argue: "Let this righteous man rest his head on me!" "No, on me!" At once the Holy One fused them into a single stone, "the stone that he had put under his head" (v. 18). **And lay down in that place.** Emphasizing that he lay down only in *that* place—for the first time in 14 years. For all the years he served in the academy of Eber, he never slept at night. Instead, he learned Torah.

KIMHI **10 Jacob left Beer-sheba, and set out for Haran.** It is standard for the text to state the beginning and end of a story and then tell what happened in between.

11 He came upon a certain place and stopped there for the night. Rather, when the sun set and it was too dark to travel any farther, he came upon "the place" (OJPS) that was a day's travel from Beer-sheba, where travelers from Beer-sheba would sleep.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS The punctuator has made this parashah one long paragraph, without any breaks; it is a single, unified story (Abarbanel).

10 Jacob . . . set out for Haran. The translations are correct; the Hebrew says more literally that he "went" to Haran—not that he *got* there (Abarbanel).

11 He came upon a certain place. Rashi notes that Jacob realized he should have prayed at the place where his ancestors had prayed—but that was not Mount Moriah; it was Bethel, where according to 12:8 Abraham "built an altar to the LORD and invoked the LORD by name." Isaac must also have prayed at that altar, though we do not have any text proving that he did so (Hizkuni). "Place" here is understood as an allusion to "the *place* that the LORD your God will choose" of Deut. 12:5 and elsewhere in Deuteronomy, the place most suitable to receive the divine overflow (Gersonides). Jacob was unhappy at having to leave home and did not intend to sleep in a town or even on a bed. Fortunately for him, he ended up at "the place" (as the Hebrew literally says)—"the place" (22:4) that Abraham saw from afar (Abarbanel). "The place" refers to "the place" in the town square of each city that was set up for travelers (Sforno). **For the sun had set.** If it hadn't, he would have kept going as far as he could, to get away from Esau (Bekhor Shor). In fact, he should have kept going, since in the summer and even the fall one does not stop traveling when the sun goes down but only when it gets dark. This is another indication that he was led to stop there by heaven (Abarbanel). **Taking one of the stones of that place.** One of the stones of the altar on which Isaac had been bound (Abarbanel). One of the stones put there for travelers to sit and eat on (Sforno). **He put it under his head.** To prop up his head while he slept, as one does (Gersonides). **And lay down in that place.** Outside of Luz, since he wanted to get an early start. If he slept in town,

RASHBAM **10 And set out for Haran.** The translations are correct.

11 He came upon a certain place. NJPS translates correctly. His route took him past a place outside the city of Luz. **For the sun had set.** He did not have enough time to make it into the city before dark. As R. Judah says on B. Pes. 2a, "One should always enter and depart in daylight." **[A] Taking one of the stones of that place.** As v. 18 demonstrates, the translations are correct.

[A] R. Judah there uses the expression "that it was good" as an idiom for "daylight," quoting "God saw the light, that it was good" (1:4).

IBN EZRA **10 Jacob left Beer-sheba, and set out for Haran.** The translations follow Saadia, who says the Hebrew here really means that Jacob left Beer-sheba "to go to Haran." But in fact it means precisely what it literally says. What follows explains what happened when "he went to Haran."

11 He came upon a certain place. During the journey described in v. 10, which he obviously did not complete in one day; he stayed in various places at night. As for "the place" (OJPS), as the Hebrew literally says here, Moses is saying, "the place that we today all know." Hosea and Amos both mention it as well. The straightforward sense of the text cannot be (as some think) that Jacob "pleaded with the Place," that is, the Holy One; we do not find God called "the Place" anywhere in the Bible. **[A]** Pay no attention to those who find that usage in Mordecai's message to Esther, "if you keep silent in this crisis, relief and deliverance will come to the Jews from another *place*" (Esther 4:14). "Another" proves it; is there another "Place"? **One of the stones of that place.** The translations are correct. **Under his head.** The unusual Hebrew word here has a plural form, parallel to "at his feet" in Ruth 3 (e.g., v. 8).

[A] In post-biblical Hebrew, this is indeed a name for God.

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NJPS down in that place. [12]He had a dream; a stairway was set on the ground and its top reached to the sky, and angels of God were going up and down on it. [13]And the LORD was standing beside him and He

וַיִּשְׁכַּב בַּמָּקוֹם הַהוּא׃ 12 וַיַּחֲלֹם וְהִנֵּה
סֻלָּם מֻצָּב אַרְצָה וְרֹאשׁוֹ מַגִּיעַ הַשָּׁמָיְמָה
וְהִנֵּה מַלְאֲכֵי אֱלֹהִים עֹלִים וְיֹרְדִים בּוֹ׃
13 וְהִנֵּה יְהוָה נִצָּב עָלָיו וַיֹּאמַר אֲנִי יְהוָה

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ What was the purpose of Jacob's dream about the "stairway" (v. 12)? ✦ Why were Abraham and Isaac never shown a vision of this kind? ✦ Why was Jacob shown it while he was traveling and weary?

OJPS place to sleep. [12]And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven; and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it. [13]And, behold, the LORD stood beside him, and said: "I am the

RASHI **12 Going up and down.** The angels who had accompanied him inside the land could not go outside it; they went up to heaven, and the angels who operate outside the land descended to accompany him further.

13 Standing beside him. To protect him. **The God of Isaac.** Nowhere else in the

KIMHI **12 He had a dream; a stairway was set on the ground and its top reached to the sky.** There are many theories about the meaning of this dream. Some say he was shown a vision of the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai, when the upper worlds and the lower worlds were united. **Angels of God were going up and down on it.** In the Sinai scenario, Moses and Aaron are the ones going up and the higher angels are the ones going down.

13 And the LORD was standing beside him. In addition to "beside him," the same

NAHMANIDES **28:12 A stairway was set on the ground and its top reached to the sky, and angels of God were going up and down on it.** In a prophetic dream, He showed him that everything done on earth is done through angels carrying out decrees of the One on high. For the angels of God who are "sent out by the LORD to roam the earth" (Zech. 1:1) cannot do anything, great or small, without "presenting themselves to the Lord of all the earth" (Zech. 6:5) to report, "We have roamed the earth, and have found all the earth dwelling in tranquility" (Zech. 1:11)—or "filled with violence and blood." Then He commands them to go back down to earth and do His will. Here, the Holy One showed Jacob that He Himself was "standing at the top of it [the stairway]" (as v. 13 should really be translated) and giving him a great promise: he would not be under the control of the angels, but would fall to "the LORD's portion" (Deut. 32:9), and He would be with him forever, as He tells him in v. 15. For Jacob outranked the rest of the righteous, of whom it is said, "For He will order His *angels* to guard you wherever you go" (Ps. 91:11). According to R. Eliezer the Great, this vision of Jacob's was the equivalent of the covenant between the pieces for Abram. **[A]** For He showed him the rise, dominion, and fall of the four kingdoms. These were the "angels of God" in our verse—the "prince of Persia" and the "prince of Greece" who were shown to Daniel (Dan. 10:20). He promised him that He would be with him and rescue him from them. They say further: He showed him the "Prince of Babylonia" going up 70 steps and coming down; then He showed him the "Prince of Media" going up 180 steps and coming down; then he showed him the "Prince of Edom" going up but not coming down. Jacob said, Nonetheless—"you are brought down to Sheol, to the bottom of the Pit" (Isa. 14:15). Yes, agreed the Holy One, "Should you nest as high as the eagle, should your eyrie be lodged 'mong the stars, even from there I will pull you down" (Obad. 1:4).

13 Standing beside him. Rather, "standing at the top of it." See my previous comment.

[A] See Genesis 15.

RASHBAM **12 A stairway was set on the ground.** It "was set" by someone; the verb is Hophal. Contrast "the LORD was *standing* beside him" (v. 13), using the Niphal of the same verb. Hophal always implies an action performed by someone else, Niphal an action performed on its own. **[B]** Compare (using other roots) 12:7 with Exod. 25:40 and Mal. 1:11 with Exod. 20:21. **Going up and down.** The straightforward sense is not that these two actions occurred in that order. It is normal to say "up" before saying "down."

[B] See Special Topics, "Biblical Hebrew."

IBN EZRA **12 He had a dream.** I must use this place to express my astonishment at Samuel b. Hophni for confusing human dreams with prophetic ones. **[B] A stairway.** Those who take *sullam* to be metathesis for *semel* (the "statue" made by Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 3) or say that it stands in for Sinai (the two Hebrew words are numerically equivalent) are indulging in midrash. The Spaniard Solomon ibn Gabirol says this stairway is an allusion to the highest human soul. **Angels of God.** Per Ibn Gabirol, "thoughts of wisdom." Jeshua b. Judah **[C]** says the point of the stairway was that Jacob's prayer went up and his salvation came down from heaven. But all these commentators must have missed the prophecies of Zechariah, Amos, and Jeremiah. The stairway is a symbol, a parable. **Going up and down on it.** Nothing can be concealed from the Holy One, and the lower world depends on the upper. There is, as it were, a "stairway" between them, which the angels ascend to make known the various things they discover while roaming over the earth. Other angels descend the stairway to fulfill the missions on which the Holy One sends them, just as a king does with those who serve him.

[B] See Ibn Ezra's introduction, "The First Path." **[C]** A Karaite commentator.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS the gates would still be shut when he wanted to leave (Hizkuni). The verse uses "place" three times in reference to the First, Second, and Third Temples (Abarbanel).

12 A stairway. The Hebrew word is not found anywhere else in the Bible (Masorah). None of the commentators has managed to explain what Sinai, or the four elements, or any of their other interpretations of this stairway has to do with Jacob and his own story. After all, we do not find a vision of this kind given to Abraham or Isaac. I am going to give my interpretation, and you decide which makes more sense. Jacob may already have been regretting the way he got the blessing and the birthright, fearing that it was not right in God's eyes. So God arranged for him to sleep here and to have a vision confirming that the three promises given to Abraham—divine providence for him and his descendants, the gift of the land of Canaan, and the promise of offspring—were confirmed for Jacob as well (Abarbanel). **Angels of God.** This expression occurs also only in 32:2, at the very end of the parashah (Masorah). These were the divine powers, which are called "angels" (Gersonides). **Angels of God were going up and down on it.** In my opinion, he did not actually see angels on the stairway, but realized that it was a stairway made for angels to use when necessary. "Up and down" from his own, human point of view; obviously the angels, who dwell above, would have gone "down and up." Some explain that he actually saw them going first up and then down, imagined that they dwelled in that spot on earth, and thus made the exclamation we read in v. 17. But Jacob cannot ever have thought that angels dwelt on earth (Bekhor Shor). The allusion here is to the different powers each taking its place on a particular stair of the stairway, that is, at a particular level (Gersonides).

13 And the LORD was standing beside him. Rather, He was standing "over him." This represents the divine providence that would

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NJPS said, "I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac: the ground on which you are lying I will assign to you and to your offspring. [14]Your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth; you shall spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All the families of the earth shall bless themselves by you and your descendants. [15]Remember, I am with you: I will protect you wherever you go and will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you."

[16]Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, "Surely the LORD is present in this place,

אֱלֹהֵי֙ אַבְרָהָ֣ם אָבִ֔יךָ וֵאלֹהֵ֖י יִצְחָ֑ק הָאָ֗רֶץ
אֲשֶׁר־אַתָּה֙ שֹׁכֵ֣ב עָלֶ֔יהָ לְךָ֥ אֶתְּנֶ֖נָּה
וּלְזַרְעֶֽךָ׃ 14 וְהָיָ֤ה זַרְעֲךָ֙ כַּעֲפַ֣ר הָאָ֔רֶץ
וּפָרַצְתָּ֣ יָ֔מָּה וָקֵ֖דְמָה וְצָפ֣וֹנָה וָנֶ֑גְבָּה וְנִבְרְכ֣וּ
בְךָ֔ כֹּ֖ל מִשְׁפְּחֹ֣ת הָאֲדָמָ֑ה וּבְזַרְעֶֽךָ׃
15 וְהִנֵּ֤ה אָנֹכִי֙ עִמָּ֔ךְ וּשְׁמַרְתִּ֖יךָ בְּכֹ֣ל אֲשֶׁר־
תֵּלֵ֑ךְ וַהֲשִׁבֹתִ֙יךָ֙ אֶל־הָאֲדָמָ֣ה הַזֹּ֔את כִּ֣י
לֹ֤א אֶֽעֶזָבְךָ֙ עַ֣ד אֲשֶׁר־אִם־עָשִׂ֔יתִי אֵ֥ת
אֲשֶׁר־דִּבַּ֖רְתִּי לָֽךְ׃
16 וַיִּיקַ֥ץ יַעֲקֹ֖ב מִשְּׁנָת֑וֹ וַיֹּ֣אמֶר אָכֵ֔ן יֵ֥שׁ

RASHI Bible do we find the Holy One called "the God of So-and-So" when the person is still living. For "He puts no trust in His holy ones" (Job 15:15). But here He did call Himself "the God of Isaac," for Isaac's eyes had dimmed and he was confined to the house. He was essentially dead, and the evil impulse had left him. (See the Tanhuma.) **The ground on which you are lying.** The Holy One folded up the entire land of Israel underneath him, hinting to him that it would be just that easy for his descendants to conquer.

14 You shall spread out. Rather, "you shall overcome." The same verb has the same implication in "But the more they were oppressed, the more they increased and *spread out*" (Exod. 1:12).

15 I am with you. He was afraid of Esau and Laban. **What I have promised you.** More precisely, "what I promised *with regard to* you," that is, *for* you and *about* you. What I promised Abraham about his descendants I promised for you, not for Esau. I did not tell him, "it is Isaac that shall continue offspring for you," but "it is *through* Isaac that offspring shall be continued for you" (21:12)—meaning not all of Isaac's offspring. — When the preposition *l-* follows a verb of speaking, it does not mean speaking "to" someone but speaking "about" them. Our verse proves it, since the Holy One had never spoken to Jacob before this moment.

16 The LORD is present in this place, and I did not know it! Had I known it I would not have slept in such a holy place.

KIMHI phrase could also mean "on it," as in "the LORD came down *upon* Mount Sinai" (Exod. 19:20). Others say what He showed him was the sacrificial ritual that his descendants would perform: the stairway being the altar; its top "reaching to the sky," the smoke of the offerings; and the "angels of God," the priests who brought the sacrifices and burned the incense. Still others think the purpose of the dream was to educate Jacob about the providence with which the Holy One runs the world—via intermediaries. **The God of your father Abraham.** Your father and not the father of the other children; his inheritance belongs to you. **The ground on which you are lying.** Rather, "the land" (OJPS), on part of which you are lying. The same applies to "I give all the land that you see to you and your offspring forever" (13:15)—"the land, part of which you see."

15 I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you. Which means He would not leave him ever, since the promise extended to his descendants after him.

OJPS LORD, the God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac. The land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed. [14]And thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south. And in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed. [15]And, behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee whithersoever thou goest, and will bring thee back into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of."

[16]And Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and he said: "Surely the LORD is in this

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why was Jacob told, "you shall spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south" (v. 14), which he himself obviously did not do? If that was meant to apply to his offspring, why doesn't it say so instead of using the singular "you"?

RASHBAM 13 The ground on which you are lying I will assign to you and to your offspring. Should you think, "That is not very much!" . . .

14 You shall spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. To the four corners of the earth. **Shall bless themselves by you.** Rather, "shall graft themselves on to you." That is, they shall intermix with your family. Note that this form is Niphal, not the Pual that is the passive of the Piel "bless." See my comment to 12:3. **[C]**

15 I will not leave you. During your journeys. **Until I have done what I have promised you.** What I promised *about* you—to bring you back to this land. While you are away, you will require additional angelic protection: "For He will order His angels to guard you wherever you go" (Ps. 91:11).

16 Surely the LORD is present in this place. And it is not as I thought when I lay down here, that this was an ordinary location. Rather [a more correct translation than "surely"], it is a sacred place. — The Hebrew *akhen* always means "So it is this way

[C] See Special Topics, "Biblical Hebrew." Rashbam's comment to 12:3 in this edition was taken from here; that part of his commentary is now missing.

IBN EZRA 14 You shall spread out. In quantity, as in "the man *grew exceedingly prosperous*" (30:43), which uses the same verb.

16 Surely the LORD is present. The point is that there are certain places on earth where miracles occur. Why they occur

16 Surely the LORD is present in this place, and I did not know it! Had I known, I would not have slept in this place. — This may have been Jacob's first experience of prophecy, another reason to recognize it as a special location.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS continue to care for Jacob (Abarbanel). **The ground on which you are lying.** The second promise, of land (Abarbanel).

14 You shall spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. Confirmation of the third promise, of offspring (Abarbanel). **All the families of the earth shall bless themselves by you and your descendants.** Since you will have spread out among them to the four corners of the earth, the divine providence that looks after you will affect them as well (Gersonides).

15 I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you. Nor ever afterward. It does not mean that He would do it and then leave (Bekhor Shor). Until I have given you countless descendants and given you possession of the land (Gersonides). Once I have done those things, I will not merely not leave your descendants but [as Lev. 26:12 puts it] "I will be ever present in your midst" (Sforno).

16 I did not know it! Had I known it, I would have prepared myself for prophecy (Sforno).

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NJPS and I did not know it!" [17]Shaken, he said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the abode of God, and that is the gateway to heaven." [18]Early in the morning, Jacob took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up as a pillar and poured oil on the top of it.

יְהוָ֖ה בַּמָּק֣וֹם הַזֶּ֑ה וְאָנֹכִ֖י לֹ֥א יָדָֽעְתִּי׃ 17 וַיִּירָ֕א וַיֹּאמַ֕ר מַה־נּוֹרָ֥א הַמָּק֖וֹם הַזֶּ֑ה אֵ֣ין זֶ֔ה כִּ֥י אִם־בֵּ֖ית אֱלֹהִ֑ים וְזֶ֖ה שַׁ֥עַר הַשָּׁמָֽיִם׃ 18 וַיַּשְׁכֵּ֤ם יַעֲקֹב֙ בַּבֹּ֔קֶר וַיִּקַּ֣ח אֶת־הָאֶ֔בֶן אֲשֶׁר־שָׂ֥ם מְרַֽאֲשֹׁתָ֖יו וַיָּ֣שֶׂם אֹתָ֑הּ מַצֵּבָ֔ה וַיִּצֹ֥ק שֶׁ֖מֶן עַל־רֹאשָֽׁהּ׃

RASHI **17 This is none other than the abode of God.** Said R. Eleazar in the name of R. Yose b. Zimra: "This ladder [see OJPS, v. 12] stands in Beer-sheba; halfway up the ladder is directly over the Temple." For Beer-sheba is in the south of Judah and Jerusalem is in the north, right on the border between Judah and Benjamin, and Bethel was in the northern part of the territory of Benjamin, on the border between Benjamin and the sons of Joseph. The ladder had its foot in Beer-sheba, its head in Bethel, and its absolute center directly opposite Jerusalem. The Sages say: The Holy One said, "Can this righteous man come to My inn and not spend the night there?" They say further: "It was Jerusalem that Jacob called 'the abode of God.'" But Jacob is in Luz, not Jerusalem. From where did they learn to say this? What I say is that Mount Moriah was uprooted and came here. That is the folding of the earth that is explained on B. Hul. 91b. The sanctuary came to Bethel to meet him. That also explains the meaning of "he came upon the place" (v. 10). You might ask, "When Jacob passed the place of the sanctuary, why didn't He detain him there?" The answer is simple. If his own heart did not stop him, why would heaven detain him? But when he got to Haran it did; see my comment to "He came upon a certain place" (v. 11). **And that is the gateway to heaven.** A place where prayer can ascend to heaven. Interpreting midrashically, the Temple on high is positioned directly over the Temple below.

18 The stone that he had put under his head. See my comment to "he put it under his head" (v. 11).

OJPS place; and I knew it not." [17]And he was afraid, and said: "How full of awe is this place! this is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven." [18]And Jacob rose up early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put under his head, and set it up for a pillar, and poured oil upon the top of it.

RASHBAM and not as I thought." Compare "Moses was frightened, and thought: *Then* the matter is known!" (Exod. 2:14).

18 And poured oil on the top of it. That is, he anointed it, to sanctify it for the purpose of offering sacrifice on it when he

IBN EZRA in those places is inexplicable; it is an extraordinary mystery.

17 This is none other than the abode of God. Where one can pray in time of need and one's prayer will be heeded because the place is a special one.

18 Jacob took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up as a pillar. Many have wondered how Jacob could set up a pillar. Have they forgotten that Moses "set up . . . twelve pillars for the twelve tribes of Israel" (Exod. 24:4)? The Torah does not forbid setting up a pillar if it is dedicated to the Holy One—it only says,

KIMHI **17 Shaken.** "He was afraid" (OJPS) that he had not conducted himself properly when he was sleeping there. **This is none other than the abode of God.** This is a location that must have a sanctuary where people can pray to God and offer sacrifice to Him. [Or:] I must have been shown this vision so that I will make this a "house of God" (OJPS).

18 And set it up as a pillar. He stood it on end. **And poured oil on the top of it.** Either so he would recognize it on his way back from the stain left by the oil, or as an act of worship, like pouring a wine libation. And indeed when he returned to the spot, "he offered a libation on it and poured oil upon it" (35:14). All this was to demonstrate that his descendants would inherit the land. For no one took the

NAHMANIDES **17 This is none other than the abode of God, and that is the gateway to heaven.** The Temple, which is the gateway through which the prayers and offerings go to heaven. I cannot at all accept what Rashi says; the folding of the earth for Jacob was no different than the folding of the earth for Abraham's servant Eliezer, permitting him to reach Haran in a single day. See B. Sanh. 95a–b, which tells us explicitly that, when Jacob got to Haran, he realized, "I have passed by the place where my ancestors prayed without praying there myself!" As soon as he decided to return, the earth folded up and "he lighted upon the place" (OJPS, v. 11). It says nothing about Mount Moriah jumping there. Genesis Rabbah draws the comparison between Eliezer and Jacob even more closely. And, after all, if Jacob spent a number of days traveling back to Bethel, why would Mount Moriah have to jump there? Bethel is not on the border of the land of Israel or on the way from Jerusalem to Haran. And what does it even mean to talk about the "center" of the incline of a stairway? And why would the center indicate anything different than the entire length of the stairway? In fact, the midrashim are saying something else: that Jacob was blessed in Hebron (where he will eventually return to his father; see 35:27) but went to Beer-sheba to ask permission from the Holy One to leave the land. *That* is where he had this dream. R. Yose b. Zimra says: The foot of the stairway was in Beer-sheba, where he was sleeping, and the top of the stairway was above the Temple, in heaven, at the doorway where the angels go in and out. The Holy One was standing at the top of it, and so he knew that Beer-sheba was "the gateway to heaven," a good place for prayer, and that the Temple was "the abode of God." In the morning, he picked up his feet and went to Haran—in a single day. That was the "folding of the earth" according to R. Yose b. Zimra. According to him, Luz (which Jacob named Bethel, and where he set up the pillar) was another name for Jerusalem; it is not impossible to make Josh. 18:13 fit this interpretation. **[B]** But this is certainly not the Bethel that was west of Ai, which already had that name in Abraham's time (see 12:8). R. Judah b. Simon disagrees with R. Yose b. Zimra. **[C]** Despite the minor differences between the midrashim, they all agree that the "folding of the earth" that happened for Jacob enabled him to travel a journey of some days in the blink of an eye. They might even all agree with each other if he indeed accomplished every stage of this journey in that way: from Beer-sheba to Haran, back to Mount Moriah, and back again to Haran. But not a one of these midrashim says what Rashi says in his comment.

18 And set it up as a pillar. Our Sages have explained the difference between a pillar and an altar. A pillar is a single stone; an altar is made of many stones. A pillar is made for making wine libations and pouring oil, but not for offering sacrifice as an altar is. Once the

[B] Nahmanides says merely "the texts in Joshua," but Josh. 16:2, the other verse where Luz is mentioned, seems to work less well. **[C]** We omit Nahmanides' lengthy analysis of other rabbinic discussions about this incident.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **17 Shaken.** On account of his mistake (Sforno). **This is none other than the abode of God.** This place where I saw the stairway set in my dream (Sforno). **And that is the gateway to heaven.** The stairway shows that the place where it was standing is the place from which the Holy One hears prayer (Sforno).

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NJPS [19]He named that site Bethel; but previously the name of the city had been Luz.

[20]Jacob then made a vow, saying, "If God remains with me, if He protects me on this journey that I am making, and gives me bread to eat and clothing to wear, [21]and if I return safe to my father's house—the LORD shall be my God. [22]And this stone,

[19] וַיִּקְרָא אֶת־שֵׁם־הַמָּקוֹם הַהוּא בֵּית־אֵל
וְאוּלָם לוּז שֵׁם־הָעִיר לָרִאשֹׁנָה׃
[20] וַיִּדַּר יַעֲקֹב נֶדֶר לֵאמֹר אִם־יִהְיֶה
אֱלֹהִים עִמָּדִי וּשְׁמָרַנִי בַּדֶּרֶךְ הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר
אָנֹכִי הוֹלֵךְ וְנָתַן־לִי לֶחֶם לֶאֱכֹל וּבֶגֶד
לִלְבֹּשׁ׃ [21] וְשַׁבְתִּי בְשָׁלוֹם אֶל־בֵּית אָבִי
וְהָיָה יְהוָה לִי לֵאלֹהִים׃ [22] וְהָאֶבֶן הַזֹּאת

OJPS [19]And he called the name of that place Beth-el, but the name of the city was Luz at the first.

[20]And Jacob vowed a vow, saying: "If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, [21]so that I come back to my father's house in peace, then shall the LORD be my God, [22]and this stone,

RASHI **20 If God remains with me.** If He keeps these promises for me. For He promised He was with me: "I am with you" (v. 15). **If He protects me.** "I will protect you wherever you go" (v. 15). **And gives me bread to eat.** "I will not leave you" (v. 15), that is, "abandon" you. For one who is desperate for bread is spoken of as being abandoned: "I have never seen a righteous man abandoned, or his children seeking bread" (Ps. 37:25).

21 And if I return. "I will bring you back to this land" (v. 15). **Safe.** Safe from sin, so that I do not learn Laban's ways. **The LORD shall be my God.** And if His name settles upon me from start to finish such that none among my children are found wanting, just as He said, "what I have promised [for] you" (v. 15), that is, promised to Abraham for you: "to be God to you and to your offspring to come" (17:7).

22 And. Rather, "*then*." If He does all these things for me, then I will do this. **This stone, which I have set up as a pillar, shall be God's abode.** That is, as Onkelos puts it, "this stone . . . shall be the one on which I worship before the Lord." And that is just

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ How can Jacob say, "if God will be with me [see OJPS], if He protects me" (v. 20), when the Lord has just told him, "I am with you: I will protect you" (v. 15)? The same applies to "if I return" (v. 21) and "I . . . will bring you back" (v. 15). ✦ How can Jacob say that "if" all those things happen, then "the LORD shall be my God," implying that if they didn't, He wouldn't be? Jacob's grandfather Abraham never did anything of this kind. On the contrary, he was tested numerous times and stood up to every test. ✦ With regard to Jacob's announcement that "this stone . . . shall be God's abode" (v. 22)—why does he never in fact build a "house of God" there?

KIMHI pillar away, not even the owner of the field. Jacob found it just as he had left it. When he returned, he built an altar there, just as if he were building something on his own property.

20 Jacob then made a vow. The conditions he made were not because he doubted God's promise. He was afraid he might sin and render the promise void, meaning he would not return safe to his father's house so as to be able to fulfill his vow. **And gives me bread to eat.** He did not ask for more than what was necessary to live. He did not have to ask for water, since there is water to drink everywhere for free.

21 And if I return safe. If I return "in peace" (OJPS), meaning, "with a wife and children." Otherwise there would be no peace for him or for his father and mother; he could not take a wife from among the Canaanites. **The LORD shall be my God.** That is, he would devote himself to the service of God and never again occupy himself with worldly affairs.

22 And this stone . . . shall be God's abode. He would order his descendants to build the House of God there when they took possession of the land.

RASHBAM returned, just as Moses "anointed and consecrated [the Tabernacle] and all its furnishings" (Num. 7:1). The proof is in 31:13. And see my comments to v. 22.

19 Previously the name of the city had been Luz. But now the city itself was called Bethel, after the site outside of town where Jacob had slept.

21 If I return safe. As He promised me in v. 15. **The LORD shall be my God.** Rather, "and if the Lord is God for me," helping me in all that I do, then . . .

22 This stone, which I have set up as a pillar, shall be God's abode. Rather, "shall be God's temple," where offerings can

IBN EZRA "a stone pillar such as the LORD your God *detests*" (Deut. 16:22). When I get to that verse I will explain it. **[D] And poured oil on the top of it.** So he would recognize it on his way back.

21 The LORD shall be my God. That is, the God identified by the Tetragrammaton, who "stood beside him" in v. 13. You will find this name explicated in my comment to Exod. 3:15.

22 Shall be God's abode. A fixed place for my prayer, and for me to tithe all the wealth that You give me to anyone worthy of receiving it, in honor of the Lord. **I will set**

[D] In his comment there, Ibn Ezra says it refers to a pillar for idol worship.

NAHMANIDES Israelites entered the land, such pillars were forbidden them, since the Canaanites had made them the rule, more so even than altars. Admittedly, the Israelites were commanded in Exod. 34:13 to "tear down their altars" as well as to "smash their pillars." But the Holy One did not want to forbid all such things to the Israelites, and so left altars permissible to them, for libations and sacrifices.

20 If God remains with me. Rashi's comment follows an interpretation in Genesis Rabbah, which says that there can be no such thing as a promise to the righteous in this world. It is possible, however, that the straightforward sense of the text is simply that it always speaks of the future as something uncertain. Even the Holy One says, in the literal Hebrew of v. 15, "I will not leave you *unless* I have done what I have promised you." (See also Num. 36:4.)

21 The LORD shall be my God. This too is not a part of the condition, as Rashi says, but a part of the vow. "If I return to my father's house, I will worship the Holy One, in the chosen land, at this stone, which will be my House of God. And there I will separate the tithe." But there is a hidden level to this comment as well, related to the rabbinic saying, "One who dwells outside the land resembles one who has no God" (B. Ket. 110b).

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **20 Jacob then made a vow, saying, "If God remains with me . . ."** Rather, "He vowed, 'God will remain with me and protect me'" and so forth (Hizkuni). Since this was the first prophecy he had received, it seems possible that he was not sure whether it was indeed a prophetic dream or perhaps just an ordinary, nonprophetic one. More likely, he is saying that if the immediate promises were indeed kept he could be confident of relying on the later ones (Abarbanel). **And gives me bread to eat.** So that poverty does not force me to violate my own conscience or that of my Creator (Sforno).

21 The LORD shall be my God. Rather, "the Lord will be my judge," as that Hebrew word can also mean—that is, my vindicator (Hizkuni).

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NJPS which I have set up as a pillar, shall be God's abode; and of all that You give me, I will set aside a tithe for You."

29 Jacob resumed his journey and came to the land of the Easterners. [2]There before his eyes was a well in the open. Three flocks of sheep were lying there beside it, for the flocks were watered from that well. The stone on the mouth of the well was large. [3]When all the flocks were gathered there, the stone would be rolled from the mouth of the well and the sheep watered; then the stone would be put back in its place on the mouth of the well.

OJPS which I have set up for a pillar, shall be God's house; and of all that Thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto Thee."

29 Then Jacob went on his journey, and came to the land of the children of the east. [2]And he looked, and behold a well in the field, and, lo, three flocks of sheep lying there by it.—For out of that well they watered the flocks. And the stone upon the well's mouth was great. [3]And thither were all the flocks gathered; and they rolled the stone from the well's mouth, and watered the sheep, and put the stone back upon the well's mouth in its place.—

אֲשֶׁר־שַׂמְתִּי מַצֵּבָה יִהְיֶה בֵּית אֱלֹהִים וְכֹל אֲשֶׁר תִּתֶּן־לִי עַשֵּׂר אֲעַשְּׂרֶנּוּ לָךְ׃

שני

כט וַיִּשָּׂא יַעֲקֹב רַגְלָיו וַיֵּלֶךְ אַרְצָה בְּנֵי־קֶדֶם׃ [2] וַיַּרְא וְהִנֵּה בְאֵר בַּשָּׂדֶה וְהִנֵּה־שָׁם שְׁלֹשָׁה עֲדְרֵי־צֹאן רֹבְצִים עָלֶיהָ כִּי מִן־הַבְּאֵר הַהִוא יַשְׁקוּ הָעֲדָרִים וְהָאֶבֶן גְּדֹלָה עַל־פִּי הַבְּאֵר׃ [3] וְנֶאֶסְפוּ־שָׁמָּה כָּל־הָעֲדָרִים וְגָלְלוּ אֶת־הָאֶבֶן מֵעַל פִּי הַבְּאֵר וְהִשְׁקוּ אֶת־הַצֹּאן וְהֵשִׁיבוּ אֶת־הָאֶבֶן עַל־פִּי הַבְּאֵר לִמְקֹמָהּ׃

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ What became of Jacob's promise that "I will set aside a tithe for You"? We never once see him tithing.

RASHI what he did when he returned from Paddan-aram. As the Holy One told him: "Arise, go up to Bethel" (35:1). And when he did so, "Jacob set up a pillar at the site where He had spoken to him, a pillar of stone, and he offered a libation on it and poured oil upon it" (Gen. 35:14).

29:1 Jacob resumed his journey. Once he had received the good news that his protection was assured, his heart grew light and he was able to "pick up his feet" (as the Hebrew literally says) and it was easy for him to resume his journey. That is how this phrase is explained in Genesis Rabbah.

2 The flocks were watered from that well. Literally, "they [the shepherds] watered the flocks" (OJPS); the text is terse.

3 When all the flocks were gathered there. Which they were accustomed to do because the stone was so big. **The stone would be rolled from the mouth of the well.** Onkelos translates with a present tense. Biblical Hebrew sometimes expresses the continuing present with a past-tense verb and sometimes with a future-tense verb, since such an activity both has happened and will happen. **The stone would be put back.** Here too Onkelos uses the present tense.

KIMHI **29:1 Jacob resumed his journey.** Literally, "he lifted his feet" lightheartedly. For originally he was dragging his feet, being depressed at having to leave his father's house. He was not fleeing in haste like someone afraid of being killed; he had no such fear as long as his father was alive.

2 The stone on the mouth of the well was large. Since there was nowhere else to water the sheep, they put so large a stone over the well that none of them could get water unless they were all there. If they tried to water their sheep one at a time, the water would run out of the trough before the next flock got there. Even if it remained for an hour or two, sheep prefer to drink water that has been freshly drawn.

NAHMANIDES **29:2 There before his eyes was a well in the open. Three flocks of sheep were lying there beside it.** The text dwells at length on this story to let us know that "they who trust in the LORD shall renew their strength" (Isa. 40:31). His fear of God will give him strength. Consider: Our father Jacob was weary from traveling, but rolled away a stone all by himself that ordinarily took all the shepherds to roll away. Three flocks of sheep means multiple shepherds and guards, who could not move it at all. Genesis Rabbah finds another allusion to the future here: The well represents the Temple, and the *three* flocks (of all the many that might have been there) represent those who would gather on the three pilgrimage festivals, who would draw on the Holy Spirit from that well. Or it may allude to "For instruction [*torah*] shall come forth from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem" (Isa. 2:3), since water is a common metaphor for Torah.

3 When all the flocks were gathered there. In keeping with the allusion mentioned in the previous comment, they would gather "from Lebo-hamath to the Wadi of Egypt" (1 Kings 8:65). **The stone would be rolled from the mouth of the well and the sheep watered.** They would draw on the Holy Spirit. **Then the stone would be put back in its place on the mouth of the well.** Until it was time for the next festival.

RASHBAM be brought. **I will set aside a tithe for You.** To offer in sacrifice before You.

29:1 Jacob resumed his journey. Once the Holy One had given His promise, Jacob "picked up his feet," that is, his pace, and walked quickly and joyfully. **The land of the Easterners.** Aram: "Aram from the east" (Isa. 9:11).

2 Lying there beside it. Waiting until all the flocks gathered and they would roll away the stone. **The stone on the mouth of the well was large.** So that no one could fall in, or so that other people would not draw water from it.

IBN EZRA **aside a tithe for You.** The idea that this "tithe" is his son Levi is midrashic. The Torah says nothing about a man tithing his sons—only his cattle, sheep, and crops.

29:2 There before his eyes. The Hebrew says simply, "he looked"—a strange verb. It is Qal but has the *a* vowel of a Hiphil under the prefix letter (and not because it is followed by a guttural). It only occurs in this form when it has a י prefix, so I think it was meant to prevent confusion between our verb, ראה ("to see"), and ירה ("to throw"). Since the א is not pronounced, these two words would sound the same.

3 The stone would be rolled. The verb is active (see OJPS); the shepherds would roll it.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **29:2 There before his eyes was a well in the open.** He took this as a good omen, since Jer. 2:13 calls the Holy One "the Fount of living waters," and since Eliezer had found a wife for Isaac at just such a well (Abarbanel). **The stone on the mouth of the well was large.** So that nothing and no one should fall into it (Hizkuni). Apparently there was a drought in that land. The stone was another good omen to Jacob, though, reminding him of the stone he had set up as a pillar in 28:18 (Abarbanel).

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NJPS [4]Jacob said to them, "My friends, where are you from?" And they said, "We are from Haran." [5]He said to them, "Do you know Laban the son of Nahor?" And they said, "Yes, we do." [6]He continued, "Is he well?" They answered, "Yes, he is; and there is his daughter Rachel, coming with the flock." [7]He said, "It is still broad daylight, too early to round up the animals; water the flock and take them to pasture." [8]But they said, "We cannot, until all the flocks are rounded up; then the stone is rolled off the mouth of the well and we water the sheep."

[9]While he was still speaking with them, Rachel came with her father's flock; for

4 וַיֹּ֥אמֶר לָהֶ֖ם יַעֲקֹ֑ב אַחַ֣י מֵאַ֔יִן אַתֶּ֖ם
וַיֹּ֣אמְר֔וּ מֵחָרָ֖ן אֲנָ֥חְנוּ: 5 וַיֹּ֥אמֶר לָהֶ֖ם
הַיְדַעְתֶּ֣ם אֶת־לָבָ֣ן בֶּן־נָח֑וֹר וַיֹּ֣אמְר֔וּ
יָדָ֖עְנוּ: 6 וַיֹּ֥אמֶר לָהֶ֖ם הֲשָׁל֣וֹם ל֑וֹ וַיֹּ֣אמְר֔וּ
שָׁל֔וֹם וְהִנֵּ֥ה רָחֵ֛ל בִּתּ֖וֹ בָּאָ֥ה עִם־הַצֹּֽאן:
7 וַיֹּ֗אמֶר הֵ֚ן עוֹד֙ הַיּ֔וֹם גָּד֖וֹל לֹא־עֵ֣ת הֵאָסֵ֑ף
הַמְּקֻנֶ֔ה הַשְׁקוּ֙ הַצֹּ֔אן וּלְכ֖וּ רְעֽוּ: 8 וַיֹּ֣אמְר֔וּ
לֹ֣א נוּכַ֔ל עַ֚ד אֲשֶׁ֣ר יֵאָסְפ֔וּ כָּל־הָֽעֲדָרִ֖ים
וְגָלֲל֣וּ אֶת־הָאֶ֔בֶן מֵעַ֖ל פִּ֣י הַבְּאֵ֑ר וְהִשְׁקִ֖ינוּ
הַצֹּֽאן:
9 עוֹדֶ֣נּוּ מְדַבֵּ֣ר עִמָּ֔ם וְרָחֵ֕ל | בָּ֖אָה עִם־

RASHI **6 Coming with the flock.** Notice that "coming" here and "came" of v. 9 are the same Hebrew word; the difference is where the accent falls.

7 It is still broad daylight. Seeing that the sheep "were lying there" (v. 2), he thought they intended to stop grazing the sheep and bring them in for the night. That is why he told them it was still broad daylight. "If you are hired hands, you have not yet done your day's work! Even if these animals are your own, it is too early to round them up."

8 We cannot. Water the flock, because the stone is too big. **We water the sheep.** Then we *will* water the sheep. — This time, Onkelos translates the same Hebrew verb used in v. 3 with a future tense.

OJPS [4]And Jacob said unto them: "My brethren, whence are ye?" And they said: "Of Haran are we." [5]And he said unto them: "Know ye Laban the son of Nahor?" And they said: "We know him." [6]And he said unto them: "Is it well with him?" And they said: "It is well; and, behold, Rachel his daughter cometh with the sheep." [7]And he said: "Lo, it is yet high day, neither is it time that the cattle should be gathered together; water ye the sheep, and go and feed them." [8]And they said: "We cannot, until all the flocks be gathered together, and they roll the stone from the well's mouth; then we water the sheep."

[9]While he was yet speaking with them, Rachel came with her father's sheep; for

IBN EZRA **4 Where are you from?** "Where from" is a single word in Hebrew—but you cannot drop "from" and get a word that means "where," because without "from" this word means "nothing." And yes, it is possible for our word to mean "from nothing" in another context; see "Why, you are *less than nothing*" (Isa. 41:24).

6 There is his daughter Rachel, coming with the flock. The accent on the ultima shows that "coming" is a participle.

9 Rachel came. The same Hebrew word as in v. 6, but with penultimate accent showing that it is a perfect.

KIMHI **4 Jacob said to them.** To the shepherds of the three flocks he found there. **My friends.** Literally, "my brothers" (compare OJPS). Lot used the same expression: "I beg you, my friends" (19:7). This is how people speak to their friends or neighbors or even to people they do not know at all, just to start a conversation amicably.

5 Laban the son of Nahor. Identifying him by naming his more well-known grandfather rather than his less respectable father, Bethuel. Laban himself will swear by "the god of Nahor" in 31:53.

9 Rachel came with her father's flock; for she was a shepherdess. Their custom was to have women too working as shepherds. Even Jethro's daughters did so, though he was one of the greatest men in Midian.

NAHMANIDES **5 Do you know Laban the son of Nahor?** He was known by the name of his more famous grandfather, the head of their clan, not by the name of his father; see also "the God of Abraham and the god of Nahor" (31:53). It could also be that Bethuel was not a very respectable person and that Laban preferred his name to be associated with that of his grandfather. Remember that "Laban and Bethuel [in that order] answered" Abraham's servant in 24:50. In fact, Laban's preferring to be known as "the son of Nahor" may be to point out his connection with Nahor's brother Abraham.

9 For she was a shepherdess. And Laban's flock had no other shepherd but her. Her father put the flock in her care—she alone, all by herself, always took care of them. Her sister, Leah, never went with them at all. It was not like Jethro's daughters, all seven of whom worked together as shepherdesses: "Now the priest of Midian had seven daughters. They came to draw water, and filled the troughs to water their father's flock" (Exod. 2:16). It may be because Leah had weak eyes that were sensitive to the sun, or because Leah was of marriageable age and her father did not want her out and about. Jethro, of course, was one of the great men of Midian—a priest of that land—and men would be very cautious about approaching his daughters. Or perhaps Laban was more reserved about such things, being of the family of Abraham, who was quite properly reserved in this respect. Rachel was still a girl at this point, and there was no problem of modesty.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **4 My friends, where are you from?** He was pretty sure he was in Haran but did not want to ask them directly lest they think he was mocking them (Gersonides).

5 Laban the son of Nahor. Bethuel, Nahor's son and Laban's father, was a misanthrope; and in any case he was dead by the time Laban moved to Haran and no one there knew him (Hizkuni).

6 Is he well? Jacob wanted to know how Laban was before approaching him; it is not right for a visitor to barge in on a celebration—or its opposite (Sforno).

7 It is still broad daylight, too early to round up the animals; water the flock and take them to pasture. Why did Jacob go on and on about this? He was afraid Rachel would leave with the shepherds, and he wanted to talk to her (Hizkuni). A righteous man does not even like to see other people slacking (Sforno).

8 We cannot. The shepherds were all young boys, but Jacob was a strong, grown man (Bekhor Shor).

9 For she was a shepherdess. She knew that set of skills (Sforno).

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NJPS she was a shepherdess. [10]And when Jacob saw Rachel, the daughter of his uncle Laban, and the flock of his uncle Laban, Jacob went up and rolled the stone off the mouth of the well, and watered the flock of his uncle Laban. [11]Then Jacob kissed Rachel, and broke into tears. [12]Jacob told Rachel that he was her father's kinsman, that he was Rebekah's son; and she ran and told her father. [13]On hearing the news of his sister's son Jacob, Laban ran to greet him; he embraced him and kissed him, and took him into his house. He told Laban all that

הַצֹּאן אֲשֶׁר לְאָבִיהָ כִּי רֹעָה הִוא׃ [10] וַיְהִי
כַּאֲשֶׁר רָאָה יַעֲקֹב אֶת־רָחֵל בַּת־לָבָן אֲחִי
אִמּוֹ וְאֶת־צֹאן לָבָן אֲחִי אִמּוֹ וַיִּגַּשׁ יַעֲקֹב
וַיְגֶל אֶת־הָאֶבֶן מֵעַל פִּי הַבְּאֵר וַיַּשְׁקְ
אֶת־צֹאן לָבָן אֲחִי אִמּוֹ׃ [11] וַיִּשַּׁק יַעֲקֹב
לְרָחֵל וַיִּשָּׂא אֶת־קֹלוֹ וַיֵּבְךְ׃ [12] וַיַּגֶּד יַעֲקֹב
לְרָחֵל כִּי אֲחִי אָבִיהָ הוּא וְכִי בֶן־רִבְקָה
הִוא וַתָּרָץ וַתַּגֶּד לְאָבִיהָ׃ [13] וַיְהִי כִּשְׁמֹעַ
לָבָן אֶת־שֵׁמַע | יַעֲקֹב בֶּן־אֲחֹתוֹ וַיָּרָץ
לִקְרָאתוֹ וַיְחַבֵּק־לוֹ וַיְנַשֵּׁק־לוֹ וַיְבִיאֵהוּ
אֶל־בֵּיתוֹ וַיְסַפֵּר לְלָבָן אֵת כָּל־הַדְּבָרִים

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ What do we learn from all the details of this pointless story about a well where the flocks gather? Wouldn't it be enough to say that "Jacob saw Rachel" (v. 10) and kissed her?

OJPS she tended them. [10]And it came to pass, when Jacob saw Rachel the daughter of Laban his mother's brother, and the sheep of Laban his mother's brother, that Jacob went near, and rolled the stone from the well's mouth, and watered the flock of Laban his mother's brother. [11]And Jacob kissed Rachel, and lifted up his voice, and wept. [12]And Jacob told Rachel that he was her father's brother, and that he was Rebekah's son; and she ran and told her father. [13]And it came to pass, when Laban heard the tidings of Jacob his sister's son, that he ran to meet him, and embraced him, and kissed him, and brought him to his house. And he told

RASHI **10 Jacob went up and rolled the stone off the mouth of the well.** Like someone taking the cork out of a bottle—showing you how strong he was.

11 And broke into tears. Foreseeing, by means of the Holy Spirit, that she would not be buried with him. Another reading: Because he had come empty-handed. He thought, "Eliezer, **[A]** my grandfather's servant, brought them rings, bracelets, and all kinds of expensive gifts—but here I am with nothing!" Esau's son Eliphaz, **[B]** on his father's orders, had pursued Jacob in order to kill him, and had caught him. But since Eliphaz had grown up in Isaac's lap, he could not bring himself to do it. "But what can I do? My father commanded me to kill you!" Jacob said to him, "Take everything I have. One who is impoverished is considered as if he were dead."

12 That he was her father's kinsman. Literally, "her father's brother" (OJPS), but NJPS understands the sense correctly. Just so, when Abram tells his nephew Lot that they are "kinsmen" (13:8), he literally says "brother-men." Midrashically, however, the expression in our verse can be interpreted as follows: if he intends to trick me, I am fully prepared to be his brother in trickery; but if he is straight with me, then I too am the son of his honest sister, Rebekah." **She ran and told her father.** Her mother was dead; she had no one to tell but him.

13 Laban ran to greet him. Assuming he was loaded down with wealth. "After all, the servant of the family came here with 10 loaded camels!" **He embraced him.** After seeing that he had brought nothing with him, he thought, "Perhaps he has gold coins concealed in his clothing." **And kissed him.** "Perhaps he is hiding some pearls in his mouth." **He told Laban all that had happened.** That he had been forced to flee from his brother, and that they had taken all his money.

[A] The servant of ch. 24 is identified in Jewish tradition with "Dammesek Eliezer" of 15:2. **[B]** See ch. 36.

RASHBAM **10 Jacob went up and rolled the stone off the mouth of the well.** All by himself. The text is letting us know how strong he was.

13 All that had happened. That his father and mother had sent him to his family.

IBN EZRA **12 Jacob told Rachel.** Rather, "Jacob had [already] told Rachel." Only then did he kiss her. There are many such cases in the Bible.

13 All that had happened. Rather, "all these things" (OJPS), referring to the things in the blessing his father had given him.

KIMHI **10 Jacob went up and rolled the stone off the mouth of the well.** With the three shepherds who were there—or, if he did it all by himself, it was through God's blessing him with extra strength.

11 Then Jacob kissed Rachel. Which she permitted him to do, seeing that he had done all this for her sake. **And broke into tears.** Of joy.

NAHMANIDES **11 Then Jacob kissed Rachel.** Who was still just a girl (see the previous comment). Or perhaps, as Ibn Ezra says in his comment to 27:27, kissing "to" someone (as in our verse also) indicates not a kiss on the mouth but one on the head or the shoulder.

12 She ran and told her father. Rashi's comment that her mother was dead follows Genesis Rabbah. But the straightforward sense is simply that she wanted to tell him that his cousin had arrived so he would come out to welcome him. What would her mother have to do with this part of the story? In Rebekah's case, she told her mother **[D]** because she wanted to show her the jewelry Eliezer had given her, as girls like to do.

[D] See 24:28.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **11 Then Jacob kissed Rachel.** On her hands, or on her garments (Gersonides). **And broke into tears.** At not having met her when he was young, for if he had he would have children by now (Sforno).

12 Jacob told Rachel that he was her father's kinsman. So she wouldn't be disgusted that he had kissed her (Hizkuni).

13 On hearing the news of his sister's son Jacob. That he had rolled away the stone all by himself (Sforno). **He told Laban all that had happened.** How he had gotten the birthright and the blessing, to make it appear that he deserved one of Laban's daughters; and how he was fleeing from Esau, so Laban would not wonder why someone so well off had arrived with nothing but a walking stick and a backpack. Jacob had slipped away quietly to avoid drawing Esau's attention (Bekhor Shor). So Laban would understand that he had not come in search of work but to escape from his brother, and on his mother's instructions (Sforno).

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NJPS had happened, [14]and Laban said to him, "You are truly my bone and flesh."

When he had stayed with him a month's time, [15]Laban said to Jacob, "Just because you are a kinsman, should you serve me for nothing? Tell me, what shall your wages be?" [16]Now Laban had two daughters; the name of the older one was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. [17]Leah had weak eyes; Rachel was shapely and beautiful. [18]Jacob loved Rachel; so he

הָאֵלֶּה׃ 14 וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ לָבָן אַךְ עַצְמִי וּבְשָׂרִי
אָתָּה
וַיֵּשֶׁב עִמּוֹ חֹדֶשׁ יָמִים׃ 15 וַיֹּאמֶר לָבָן
לְיַעֲקֹב הֲכִי־אָחִי אַתָּה וַעֲבַדְתַּנִי חִנָּם
הַגִּידָה לִּי מַה־מַּשְׂכֻּרְתֶּךָ׃ 16 וּלְלָבָן שְׁתֵּי
בָנוֹת שֵׁם הַגְּדֹלָה לֵאָה וְשֵׁם הַקְּטַנָּה
רָחֵל׃ 17 וְעֵינֵי לֵאָה רַכּוֹת וְרָחֵל הָיְתָה
יְפַת־תֹּאַר וִיפַת מַרְאֶה׃ 18 וַיֶּאֱהַב יַעֲקֹב

OJPS Laban all these things. [14]And Laban said to him: "Surely thou art my bone and my flesh."

And he abode with him the space of a month. [15]And Laban said unto Jacob: "Because thou art my brother, shouldest thou therefore serve me for nought? tell me, what shall thy wages be?" [16]Now Laban had two daughters: the name of the elder was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. [17]And Leah's eyes were weak; but Rachel was of beautiful form and fair to look upon. [18]And Jacob loved Rachel;

RASHI **14 You are truly my bone and flesh.** Since you have nothing, there is no point in my bringing you home; but since we are related I will put you up for a month. — And that is exactly what he did. And he didn't even do that for free, since Jacob spent the time tending his sheep.

15 Just because you are a kinsman. Rather, "Are you not my kinsman?" **Should you serve me for nothing?** As always, the ו converts the past tense verb into a future one.

17 Leah had weak eyes. She assumed she would fall to Esau's lot and was crying about it. For everyone said, "Rebekah has two sons and Laban has two daughters; it makes sense to pair up the elder two and the younger two." **Rachel was shapely.** That is, her *face* was well shaped. The Hebrew word is related to "marks out a shape" (Isa. 44:13). **And beautiful.** More precisely, her coloring was "fair" (OJPS).

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ How is Laban's remark "You are truly my bone and flesh" (v. 14) an adequate response to Jacob's whole long tale? Did he think Jacob didn't know they were related? ✦ Why did Jacob pick Rachel when he must have known that the older sister had to be married first? If it was because "Rachel was shapely and beautiful" (v. 17)—well, "grace is deceptive, beauty is illusory" (Prov. 31:30); if because "Leah had weak eyes"—remember what the Lord said to Samuel, "Pay no attention to his appearance or his stature . . . man sees only what is visible, but the LORD sees into the heart" (1 Sam. 16:7). Jacob should really not have been paying attention to such outward things.

RASHBAM **14 You are truly my bone and flesh.** You did right to come to me.

15 Just because you are a kinsman, should you serve me for nothing? Rather, "Aren't you my kinsman?" — And you should therefore get good pay. "Yet you serve me for nothing!"

16 Now Laban had two daughters. The text interrupts their conversation for an aside to give us the information we need to understand Jacob's answer.

17 Leah had weak eyes. Rather, "soft" eyes, that is, lovely, bright eyes. As the Talmud says, "When a bride has lovely eyes, you need look no further." Dark eyes are just not as pretty as light-colored ones. **Shapely.** As Isa. 44:13 shows, the reference is to the outline of her face: the nose, the forehead, the mouth, and the cheeks. **Beautiful.** With a strawberries-and-cream complexion.

KIMHI **14 You are truly my bone and flesh.** Don't worry about having left your father's house; with me, you will lack nothing.

17 Leah had weak eyes. Her eyes were weak and watery, though her face and figure were as beautiful as Rachel's.

IBN EZRA **14 A month's time.** See my comment to 4:3.

17 Leah had weak eyes. "Weak" means what it says. Some wonder why this was so, imagining that the Holy One's plans are like their own. So all created beings ought to be equal. That Karaite Ben Ephraim thinks the Hebrew word is missing an א, and that Leah had "long" eyes. But he was missing his own א when he said that—thinking like a *ben parim*, an animal. **Shapely.** Using the same root as in "the boundary *curved*" of Josh. 15:9 and elsewhere in that section. Every part of her face, the eyes, nose, and mouth, were all beautifully shaped, as was the whole. The Hebrew word is really an expression, "shapely *looking*," which may perhaps be interpreted instead as an idiom meaning that she had a face that was beautiful.

NAHMANIDES **15 Just because you are a kinsman, should you serve me for nothing?** The text has told us nothing about Jacob serving Laban. Conceivably he had been doing so ever since he first watered Laban's flock, taking over Rachel's role of shepherd out of his concern and love for her. It is also conceivable that Laban is being tricky here. Once he saw that Jacob was extending his visit and was living off him, he said, "Even though you are a kinsman, I know that you are a very moral man and will want to work for me because you do not wish to live off someone else. For my part, I certainly would not want you to work for free. Tell me what you would like to be paid, and I will give it to you." Jacob understood what he was getting at and gave him the answer you see in v. 18. "Service" without any further explanation here obviously referred to working as a shepherd; that is the kind of service that was necessary, and that is what they were talking about.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **14 You are truly my bone and flesh.** I should have gotten rid of you the way the rest of your family did after you cheated your brother twice. But you are truly my bone and flesh, and I won't get rid of you (Hizkuni). Even though you and Esau are both Rebekah's sons, having heard your story I can say that you are truly my bone and flesh—not he (Abarbanel). You could make a living elsewhere, as a shepherd or in other ways, but since you are my bone and flesh, stay with me (Sforno). **When he had stayed with him a month's time.** Knowing what Jacob had done to Esau, Laban did not want to hire him without a trial period (Hizkuni).

17 Leah had weak eyes. The text is telling us that Leah's beauty was in no way inferior to Rachel's, but that her eyes were weak. It was hard for her to walk against the wind, which is why Rachel was out with the sheep—or perhaps that was to treat the elder daughter with more respect (Bekhor Shor). This was the result of some illness or other, and Jacob chose the younger sister because he wanted his children to be healthy (Gersonides).

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NJPS answered, "I will serve you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel." [19]Laban said, "Better that I give her to you than that I should give her to an outsider. Stay with me." [20]So Jacob served seven years for Rachel and they seemed to him but a few days because of his love for her.

[21]Then Jacob said to Laban, "Give me my wife, for my time is fulfilled, that I may cohabit with her." [22]And Laban gathered all the people of the place and made a feast. [23]When evening came, he took his daughter Leah and brought her to

אֶת־רָחֵל וַיֹּאמֶר אֶעֱבָדְךָ שֶׁבַע שָׁנִים
בְּרָחֵל בִּתְּךָ הַקְּטַנָּה׃ 19 וַיֹּאמֶר לָבָן ׀ טוֹב
תִּתִּי אֹתָהּ לָךְ מִתִּתִּי אֹתָהּ לְאִישׁ אַחֵר
שְׁבָה עִמָּדִי׃ 20 וַיַּעֲבֹד יַעֲקֹב בְּרָחֵל שֶׁבַע
שָׁנִים וַיִּהְיוּ בְעֵינָיו כְּיָמִים אֲחָדִים
בְּאַהֲבָתוֹ אֹתָהּ׃
21 וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב אֶל־לָבָן הָבָה אֶת־אִשְׁתִּי
כִּי מָלְאוּ יָמָי וְאָבוֹאָה אֵלֶיהָ׃ 22 וַיֶּאֱסֹף
לָבָן אֶת־כָּל־אַנְשֵׁי הַמָּקוֹם וַיַּעַשׂ מִשְׁתֶּה׃
23 וַיְהִי בָעֶרֶב וַיִּקַּח אֶת־לֵאָה בִתּוֹ וַיָּבֵא

OJPS and he said: "I will serve thee seven years for Rachel thy younger daughter." [19]And Laban said: "It is better that I give her to thee, than that I should give her to another man; abide with me." [20]And Jacob served seven years for Rachel; and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her.

[21]And Jacob said unto Laban: "Give me my wife, for my days are filled, that I may go in unto her." [22]And Laban gathered together all the men of the place, and made a feast. [23]And it came to pass in the evening, that he took Leah his daughter, and

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why did Laban say, "Better that I give her to you than that I should give her to an outsider" (v. 19), without actually promising her to him or refusing her? Why did he not say to him in plain Hebrew, "That is not how we do things here. Take Leah instead"?

RASHI **18 I will serve you seven years.** This would be the amount of time his mother told him when she said, "Stay with him a while" (27:44). Note that "a while" in that phrase is precisely the same in Hebrew as "but a few days" of v. 20; OJPS translates Rebekah's phrase also as "a few days." **For your younger daughter Rachel.** The Hebrew word order is as follows: "For Rachel, your daughter, the younger." Why didn't he just say "for Rachel"? He knew he was dealing with a trickster. He was saying this: "I will serve you for Rachel. And in case you say you thought I meant some other Rachel from off the street, I am specifying the Rachel who is your daughter. And just in case you decide to change Leah's name to Rachel, I am specifying your *younger* daughter." But none of it did him any good. He still managed to trick him.

21 My time is fulfilled. Literally, "my days" (OJPS), the "few days" my mother mentioned. Moreover, "my time is fulfilled"—I am 84 years old. When am I going to get around to producing the 12 tribes? **That I may cohabit with her.** Even the crudest person in the world would not say anything of the kind. But Jacob was making clear that he intended to father the future generations that would become the tribes.

RASHBAM **21 For my time is fulfilled.** I have served you for seven years.

KIMHI **18 I will serve you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel.** It went without saying that he would receive food and clothing.

Since the Patriarchs married for the sake of offspring and not to satisfy their desires, it is worth asking why Jacob chose Rachel for her beauty. The answer is that a beautiful woman arouses desire, and this would lead to a proliferation of offspring, who would also be good-looking. Moreover, people enjoy looking at beauty, and he would have to look at her all the time. One should be happy with one's lot, for it comes from God. The Holy One gave the Patriarchs, and the other righteous men, beautiful wives so they would enjoy their lot and produce happy, beautiful children.

20 They seemed to him but a few days. After he had served the seven years, it seemed like they had just been a few days.

22 Laban gathered all the people of the place and made a feast. This had been the custom since ancient times—and it still is.

NAHMANIDES **21 My time is fulfilled.** See Rashi's comment. Why did he not understand "my time" (like Onkelos) to refer to the seven years of service he had agreed to pay for Rachel, which is certainly what the text really means? Neither Jacob's age nor what his mother said would be any reason for Laban to give his daughter to Jacob before the time on which they had mutually agreed. He could not be expected to do more than fulfill the bargain he had actually made! But see my comment to v. 27. **That I may cohabit with her.** The Sages did not think this expression was proper, all the more so from the mouth of such a righteous man, and therefore explain it midrashically. Nonetheless, the straightforward sense is the correct one. Again, see my next comment.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **18 I will serve you seven years.** He should have said just a year or two, but he did not think they would give him such a beautiful woman for so little work (Hizkuni). A righteous man would not marry and have children until he could support them; though Laban was rich, Jacob did not expect Laban to give him his daughters if he could not support them (Sforno). **For your younger daughter Rachel.** It was clear that, as the younger daughter, she was so little valued that they made her a shepherdess. So Jacob decided to replace her as the shepherd (Hizkuni). Since he was the younger son, he thought the younger daughter was appropriate for him; and of course she was the one he had providentially encountered at the well. On top of that, he was afraid Leah's eyes would eventually make her go blind as his father, Isaac, had (Abarbanel). The seven years of work were in the nature of a bride-price. Moreover, after seven years Rachel would be grown enough to be married—and Laban would have time to marry off her older sister (Sforno).

20 So Jacob served seven years for Rachel and they seemed to him but a few days because of his love for her. He loved her so much that he felt as if he were cheating Laban by getting such a beautiful woman for so little work (Bekhor Shor). Afterward, because he loved her so much, they seemed to him like just a few days; but while he was working it seemed like a long time—and for the same reason (Hizkuni).

21 Give me my wife, for my time is fulfilled, that I may cohabit with her. Jacob said this to Laban *before* starting work. He was already somewhere between 77 and 80 and was afraid that if he waited another seven years he would be too old to have children. If Perez' son Hamul, Judah's great-grandson, was among those who went down to Egypt, Jacob cannot have waited seven years at this point to begin having children. The numbers do not add up. That is what persuaded me to explain here that Jacob asked for his wife before starting work (Gersonides). Gersonides had to completely twist the verses to arrive at this interpretation. In any case, the Hebrew merely says "that I may go in unto her" (OJPS), not "that I may cohabit with her." Jacob would not say anything so crude. He needed a permanent home of some kind to live in when he was not in the field with the sheep (Abarbanel). Jacob is explaining that he wants not just the engagement but the wedding itself to take place (Sforno).

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NJPS him; and he cohabited with her.—[24]Laban had given his maidservant Zilpah to his daughter Leah as her maid.—[25]When morning came, there was Leah! So he said to Laban, "What is this you have done to me? I was in your service for Rachel! Why did you deceive me?" [26]Laban said, "It is not the practice in our place to marry off the younger before the older. [27]Wait until the bridal week of this one is over and we will give you that one too, provided you

אֹתָהּ אֵלָיו וַיָּבֹא אֵלֶיהָ׃ [24] וַיִּתֵּן לָבָן לָהּ
אֶת־זִלְפָּה שִׁפְחָתוֹ לְלֵאָה בִתּוֹ שִׁפְחָה׃
[25] וַיְהִי בַבֹּקֶר וְהִנֵּה־הִוא לֵאָה וַיֹּאמֶר
אֶל־לָבָן מַה־זֹּאת עָשִׂיתָ לִּי הֲלֹא בְרָחֵל
עָבַדְתִּי עִמָּךְ וְלָמָּה רִמִּיתָנִי׃ [26] וַיֹּאמֶר לָבָן
לֹא־יֵעָשֶׂה כֵן בִּמְקוֹמֵנוּ לָתֵת הַצְּעִירָה
לִפְנֵי הַבְּכִירָה׃ [27] מַלֵּא שְׁבֻע זֹאת וְנִתְּנָה
לְךָ גַּם־אֶת־זֹאת בַּעֲבֹדָה אֲשֶׁר תַּעֲבֹד

OJPS brought her to him; and he went in unto her. [24]And Laban gave Zilpah his handmaid unto his daughter Leah for a handmaid. [25]And it came to pass in the morning that, behold, it was Leah; and he said to Laban: "What is this thou hast done unto me? did not I serve with thee for Rachel? wherefore then hast thou beguiled me?" [26]And Laban said: "It is not so done in our place, to give the younger before the first-born. [27]Fulfill the week of this one, and we will give thee the other also for the service which thou shalt serve with me yet

RASHI **25 When morning came, there was Leah!** But at night, it was not Leah. For Jacob had given Rachel a sign. But when Rachel saw they were sending Leah to him, she thought, "My sister will be shamed." So she gave her the sign.

27 Wait until the bridal week of this one is over. The seven days of the bridal festivities. As explained in Tractate Mo'ed Katan of the Palestinian Talmud, the grammar shows that our phrase must be read as "the week of this" and not as "this week." **And we will give you that one too.** This is the lengthened form of the verb, as in "Let us, then, go

KIMHI **26 It is not the practice in our place to marry off the younger before the older.** Even though, since you asked for the younger, that apparently is the practice where you come from, it is impossible to do that here.

27 Wait until the bridal week of this one is over and we will give you that one too. The translations could be correct that "we will give" is a plural of majesty, or it could be a Niphal converted perfect: "she will be given to you." **[A]** This verse is the source of the rabbinic tradition that two happy occasions should not be mingled together.

[A] See Special Topics, "Biblical Hebrew."

NAHMANIDES **27 Wait until the bridal week of this one is over.** Again, see Rashi's comment, this time following Onkelos to say that the Hebrew refers to "the bridal *week*" and not the "seven years" of labor, which, as Jacob said to Laban in v. 21, had already been fulfilled. Ibn Ezra says the same. But I don't know. The idea that a wedding celebration lasts for seven days is something that was established for us later, by Moses. Perhaps prominent people in other nations were already doing so, as is the case with the seven-day mourning period we observe: "[Joseph] observed a mourning period of seven days for his father" (50:10). The rabbinic tradition that two separate occasions for rejoicing should not be combined into one is certainly a custom that dates back to before the Torah. Though the Palestinian Talmud and Genesis Rabbah both attach that custom to this occasion, our own Talmud, the Babylonian Talmud, derives it from "Solomon kept the Feast for seven days" (2 Chron. 7:8). But perhaps this is an example of Laban's "changing my wages time and again" (31:7). Jacob said, "My time is fulfilled" (v. 21), but Laban said nothing and gave him Leah. Afterward, Laban said to him, "Fulfill the week of this one" (OJPS)—"you have not yet worked seven years for this one. I gave her to you in advance." And Jacob worked another seven years. What else could he do? He wanted Rachel. That is why the Torah itself does not say, "When the time was fulfilled." It may also be that Jacob told him, during the seventh year, "my time is *being* fulfilled," that is, about to be. For similar usages, see "until the day that your period of ordination *is completed*" (Lev. 8:33); "those of *advanced* years" (Jer. 6:11). Notice that Jacob in v. 21 does not say, "Give me my wife and let me go," but "Give me my wife . . . that I may cohabit with her." His intent was to say, "Let me have my wife; you need not fear, I will complete the few days of service that I still owe you." But what happened happened. Then Laban told him, "Now fulfill the seven years for this one, Leah—which you might not wish to do because of how I fooled you." Or perhaps he said this in order to make clear when the seven years of service for Rachel would begin. "Then I will give you the other one in return for the seven years of labor you will give me *after* the wedding." **And we will give you that one too.** See Rashi's comment. But he does not say why an individual would call himself "we." Perhaps he thinks that to speak as if this were not an individual decision is a more elevated kind of Hebrew. Ibn Ezra thinks the verb is a Niphal converted perfect: "she will be given to you." **[E]** In my view, this is all part of Laban's ruse. He

[E] This interpretation does not appear in our standard texts of Ibn Ezra, but it would not be out of character; see Kimhi's comment.

RASHBAM **25 There was Leah!** The Hebrew word that OJPS translates as "behold" always indicates something that was not previously realized. You will find it also (for example) in "Then Pharaoh awoke: it was a dream!" (41:7).

27 Wait until the bridal week of this one is over. More precisely, "fulfill the [bridal] week" (OJPS) of this one. **And we will give you that one too.** Rather, "and that one will be given to you too"—but she will be given to you immediately. **Provided you serve me.** After marrying Rachel. **Another seven years.** And, indeed, "after Rachel had borne Joseph, Jacob said to Laban . . . 'Give me my wives and my children,

IBN EZRA **27 Wait until the bridal week of this one is over.** The Hebrew word could refer to a period of seven years; here the reference is indeed to the seven *days* of the wedding feast. "This one" refers to Leah.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **24 Laban had given his maidservant Zilpah to his daughter Leah as her maid.** Zilpah and Bilhah were Laban's daughters as well, but by concubines; we learn that, according to the laws of that country, such daughters were considered maidservants (Hizkuni).

25 When morning came, there was Leah! Out of propriety, he had spoken little with her during the night; or perhaps (for the same reason) he had spoken so little with Rachel before they were married that he did not recognize her voice (Bekhor Shor). You might object that this was not a valid marriage and should have been annulled; it would seem that once he realized it was Leah he consummated that marriage voluntarily (Hizkuni). Once he had consummated the marriage, he apparently did not stay in bed with her (Abarbanel).

26 It is not the practice in our place to marry off the younger before the older. And the locals will not let me keep my promise (Sforno).

27 We will give you that one too. Since Laban had already deceived him once, Jacob would not believe him until the men of the town gave him their promise (Hizkuni). "We"—I and my wife, or I and the other men of the place (Abarbanel).

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NJPS serve me another seven years." [28]Jacob did so; he waited out the bridal week of the one, and then he gave him his daughter Rachel as wife.—[29]Laban had given his maidservant Bilhah to his daughter Rachel as her maid.—[30]And Jacob cohabited with Rachel also; indeed, he loved Rachel more than Leah. And he served him another seven years.

[31]The LORD saw that Leah was unloved and he opened her womb; but Rachel was barren. [32]Leah conceived and bore a son, and named him Reuben; for she declared, "It means: 'The LORD has seen my affliction'; it also means: 'Now my husband

עִמָּדִי עוֹד שֶׁבַע־שָׁנִים אֲחֵרוֹת׃ 28 וַיַּעַשׂ
יַעֲקֹב כֵּן וַיְמַלֵּא שְׁבֻעַ זֹאת וַיִּתֶּן־לוֹ
אֶת־רָחֵל בִּתּוֹ לוֹ לְאִשָּׁה׃ 29 וַיִּתֵּן לָבָן
לְרָחֵל בִּתּוֹ אֶת־בִּלְהָה שִׁפְחָתוֹ לָהּ
לְשִׁפְחָה׃ 30 וַיָּבֹא גַּם אֶל־רָחֵל וַיֶּאֱהַב
גַּם־אֶת־רָחֵל מִלֵּאָה וַיַּעֲבֹד עִמּוֹ עוֹד
שֶׁבַע־שָׁנִים אֲחֵרוֹת׃
31 וַיַּרְא יְהוָה כִּי־שְׂנוּאָה לֵאָה וַיִּפְתַּח
אֶת־רַחְמָהּ וְרָחֵל עֲקָרָה׃ 32 וַתַּהַר לֵאָה
וַתֵּלֶד בֵּן וַתִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ רְאוּבֵן כִּי אָמְרָה
כִּי־רָאָה יְהוָה בְּעָנְיִי כִּי עַתָּה יֶאֱהָבֵנִי

OJPS seven other years." [28]And Jacob did so, and fulfilled her week; and he gave him Rachel his daughter to wife. [29]And Laban gave to Rachel his daughter Bilhah his handmaid to be her handmaid. [30]And he went in also unto Rachel, and he loved Rachel more than Leah, and served with him yet seven other years.

[31]And the LORD saw that Leah was hated, and he opened her womb; but Rachel was barren. [32]And Leah conceived, and bore a son, and she called his name Reuben; for she said: "Because the LORD hath looked upon my affliction; for now

RASHI down" (11:7). But it is just another way of saying "we will give." We will give her to you immediately after the bridal week, and you can work for her after you marry her.

30 And he served him another seven years. Another seven just like the first seven, years of faithful service—even though he had been tricked into them.

32 Leah . . . named him Reuben. Our Sages explain: "Look [*re'u*] at the difference

KIMHI **30 He loved Rachel more than Leah.** But this also informs us that he did indeed love Leah as a man loves his wife.

31 Leah was unloved. In comparison with Rachel. **He opened her womb.** Both sisters had been barren; the Lord opened Leah's womb but left Rachel as she was.

NAHMANIDES told Jacob, "It is not the local practice to marry off the younger before the older; the men of the place would consider it an outrage and not permit me to do it. But fulfill the wedding week for this one and we—I and the other local men—will all agree to give the other to you as well, and will celebrate a wedding feast for her just as we did for her sister."

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ When "Jacob cohabited with Rachel also" (v. 30), how could he imagine that it was all right to marry two sisters, and four wives in toto counting the maids? Shouldn't one of our Patriarchs have had enough sense to marry a single wife? Even Noah took only one wife. ✦ We are told that "he loved Rachel more than Leah," implying that he did also love Leah. How then can the Torah immediately tell us that "Leah was unloved" (v. 31), as indeed she calls herself in v. 33? The Hebrew word actually means "hated" (see OJPS), which is totally inappropriate for someone who is merely loved less than someone else. ✦ If Leah gives Reuben his name to denote that "the LORD has seen my affliction" (v. 32), why is she still harping on the subject when she names Simeon? Surely "seeing" her affliction matters more than merely hearing about it.

RASHBAM for whom I have served you'" (30:25–26) . . . "'I served you fourteen years for your two daughters'" (31:41).

30 And Jacob cohabited with Rachel also; indeed, he loved Rachel more than Leah. "Also" and "indeed" are the same Hebrew word; the combination really means "both . . . and." He both cohabited with her and actually loved her. It is not uncommon for this adverb to modify the verb even when it appears, as here, to be modifying the noun. See the Hebrew here and also in "may you bring a blessing upon me also!" (Exod. 12:32); "you are the one I should have killed" (Num. 22:33). In the latter case, the angel is saying, "I would not merely have lamed you, I would have killed you."

31 But Rachel was barren. We are told this to prepare us for what she will say in 30:1.

32 Now my husband will love me. The vowel connecting the verb to the object

IBN EZRA **32 Now my husband will love me.** For the unusual vowel connecting

30 Indeed, he loved Rachel more than Leah. It is natural for a man to love the woman he sleeps with first the most. (Our Sages say the same is true for women.) In this case, though, Jacob loved Rachel "even more" than he loved Leah. That is how the repetition of "also" in our verse, omitted by the translations, should be understood.

31 The LORD saw that Leah was unloved. Literally, "hated" (OJPS), having deceived both her sister and Jacob. For even if we say that she had to obey her father, she should have let Jacob know what was going on rather than pretending to be Rachel all night. That is why Jacob hated her. But the Holy One knew that she had done it in order to be married to this righteous man. Genesis Rabbah explains that Jacob intended to divorce her for what she had done to her sister. But the Holy One blessed her with children, leading Jacob to think, "How could I divorce their mother?" That is what "the Lord saw" means. The Lord took pity on her and made sure Jacob would not leave her. Others say that "hated" simply means she was the less loved of the two. As we are told in v. 30, "he loved Rachel more than Leah," but he did not hate her. Nonetheless, she was ashamed and the Holy One saw her affliction.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **30 And Jacob cohabited with Rachel.** As to why Jacob had multiple wives, there are three reasons. First, it was evident that Rachel would not have children, or no more than one or two, and this would not be enough for Jacob's offspring to proliferate as they should. So the Holy One wanted him to have multiple wives, as indeed the antediluvians had. But He knew that multiple wives can cause trouble, and decided that if Jacob married sisters they would at least have some affection for each other. Second, Jacob had both his own nature and that of the first-born, which he had acquired; Leah matched the first-born aspect and Rachel the other. Third, the four wives would permit Jacob to have 12 sons, matching the 12 signs of the zodiac (Abarbanel). **He loved Rachel.** The doctors advise those who are lovesick to have sex with other women; that will get them to forget the object of their lovesickness. But it did not work that way with Jacob (Abarbanel). **More than Leah.** Not "more than" Leah, but "on account of" Leah. He loved her for her relationship with Leah and not just for herself (Abarbanel).

31 The LORD . . . opened her womb. That is, Leah too was originally barren. The Holy One wished all the Patriarchs to be born via providence rather than nature, so that the entire history of the Chosen People could be under divine providence from beginning to end. In fact, Leah may have been originally infertile and Rachel fertile but, seeing that Rachel did nothing to help her sister draw closer to Jacob, the Holy One reversed nature for both of them (Abarbanel).

32 Now my husband will love me. Hatred (see v. 31, OJPS) will inevitably manifest itself. Leah hoped that Reuben's birth would get rid of Jacob's hatred of her (Abarbanel).

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NJPS will love me.'" 33She conceived again and bore a son, and declared, "This is because the LORD heard that I was unloved and has given me this one also"; so she named him Simeon. 34Again she conceived and bore a son and declared, "This time my husband will become attached to me, for I have borne him three sons." Therefore he was named Levi. 35She conceived again and bore a son, and declared, "This time I will praise the LORD." Therefore she named him Judah. Then she stopped bearing.

OJPS my husband will love me." 33And she conceived again, and bore a son; and said: "Because the LORD hath heard that I am hated, He hath therefore given me this son also." And she called his name Simeon. 34And she conceived again, and bore a son; and said: "Now this time will my husband be joined unto me, because I have borne him three sons." Therefore was his name called Levi. 35And she conceived again, and bore a son; and she said: "This time will I praise the LORD." Therefore she called his name Judah; and she left off bearing.

אִישִׁי׃ 33 וַתַּהַר עוֹד וַתֵּלֶד בֵּן וַתֹּאמֶר כִּי־שָׁמַע יְהוָה כִּי־שְׂנוּאָה אָנֹכִי וַיִּתֶּן־לִי גַּם־אֶת־זֶה וַתִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ שִׁמְעוֹן׃ 34 וַתַּהַר עוֹד וַתֵּלֶד בֵּן וַתֹּאמֶר עַתָּה הַפַּעַם יִלָּוֶה אִישִׁי אֵלַי כִּי־יָלַדְתִּי לוֹ שְׁלֹשָׁה בָנִים עַל־כֵּן קָרָא־שְׁמוֹ לֵוִי׃ 35 וַתַּהַר עוֹד וַתֵּלֶד בֵּן וַתֹּאמֶר הַפַּעַם אוֹדֶה אֶת־יְהוָה עַל־כֵּן קָרְאָה שְׁמוֹ יְהוּדָה וַתַּעֲמֹד מִלֶּדֶת׃

30 When Rachel saw that she had borne Jacob no children, she became envious of her sister; and Rachel said to

30 And when Rachel saw that she bore Jacob no children, Rachel envied her sister; and she said unto Jacob: "Give me

ל וַתֵּרֶא רָחֵל כִּי לֹא יָלְדָה לְיַעֲקֹב וַתְּקַנֵּא רָחֵל בַּאֲחֹתָהּ וַתֹּאמֶר אֶל־יַעֲקֹב

RASHI between [*ben*] my son and my father-in-law's son. He *sold* his birthright to Jacob, but my son Reuben will not sell his birthright to Joseph or even have any resentment at losing it. In fact, he so little resented it that he tried to save Joseph from the pit."

34 This time my husband will become attached to me. Since the Matriarchs were prophets, they knew that 12 tribes would descend from Jacob, and that he would marry four wives. Leah thought, "He can't have any complaints about me now. I have filled my quota of three sons." **Therefore.** "'Therefore' [*al ken*] marks the sons of Jacob who will have many descendants." **[C]** But this is not so in the case of Levi, among whose descendants the Ark worked some destruction. **He was named Levi.** "She named" the others, but surprisingly "he [someone masculine] named Levi." A midrash in Deuteronomy Rabbah explains: The Holy One sent Gabriel to bring the boy before Him, and He named him Levi and gave him the 24 priestly gifts. **[D]** He was given the name because the priestly gifts were "attached" to him.

35 This time I will praise the LORD. I have gotten more than my share of the 12 sons, so I must praise Him.

30:1 Rachel . . . became envious of her sister. She was envious of her good

[C] Rashi is quoting from Genesis Rabbah. **[D]** These are enumerated on B. BK 110b.

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Come to think of it, how could the Lord "hear" (v. 33) that Leah was unloved? Hatred cannot be heard. ✦ What made her think with the birth of the third child that "this time my husband will become attached to me" (v. 34)? It is certainly with the first child, the one that turns him into a father, that a husband becomes attached to his wife; subsequent children do not change his circumstances so dramatically. ✦ Why did Leah say only with the birth of her fourth child, "This time I will praise the LORD" (v. 35)? People should praise the Lord for every good thing they receive. The midrash has an answer, but we still have to figure out an answer that fits the straightforward sense of the text.

RASHBAM suffix is unexpected; but compare "The LORD *will keep me apart* from His people" (Isa. 56:3).

34 Therefore he was named Levi. Literally, "he named him Levi." Presumably Jacob gave him the name.

IBN EZRA verb to object, compare "lest the disaster *overtake me*" (19:19).

34 This time my husband will become attached to me. For the verb, compare what the Holy One tells Aaron about the tribe of Levi: "They shall be *attached* to you and discharge the duties of the Tent of Meeting" (Num. 18:4).

35 This time. The Hebrew says merely "the time," but that is idiomatic for "this time." **I will praise the LORD.** Now that I have four sons. — The implication is, "He has given me all I want." That is why **she stopped bearing.**

KIMHI **34 This time my husband will become attached to me, for I have borne him three sons.** That is, "he will sleep with me more than with my sister." Remember that the Patriarchs married in order to have children. **Therefore he was named Levi.** Rather, "he [Jacob] named him Levi," following what Leah said, and also perhaps because he foresaw prophetically that Levi's children would serve the Lord, teach Torah, and be "attached" (*nilevi'im*) to the Lord. The fact that Jacob did not give any of the other boys their names supports this interpretation. (Benjamin's name is another story, which we will tell in its place.)

35 Then she stopped bearing. For the time being. This too was God's doing, since He wanted the maidservants to bear children for Jacob as well.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **33 The LORD heard that I was unloved.** Apparently after Reuben's birth Jacob stopped acting hatefully toward Leah, but still continued to *speak* hatefully toward her. Now, she hoped, that too would cease (Abarbanel).

34 This time my husband will become attached to me. Leah's way was to give two-thirds of the honor to the Holy One and one-third to her husband; she connected "the Lord" to the names of her first two and Jacob to the name of her third. She will do the same with her next three (Bekhor Shor). Up until now I had two sons—and two hands. Now that I have three sons, my husband will have to help me raise them (Hizkuni). The absence of hatred does not equal the presence of love; this third son would finally get Jacob actually to love her. It might also be possible that Reuben's birth put an end to Jacob's hateful actions, Simeon's to his hateful talk, and Levi's to the hateful thoughts he still concealed (Abarbanel).

35 "This time I will praise the LORD." Therefore she named him Judah. A name that contains all the letters of the Tetragrammaton (Sforno). **Then she stopped bearing.** She gave birth to Reuben in the first year, Simeon in the second, Levi in the third, and Judah in the fourth before temporarily stopping. Issachar was born in the sixth year and Zebulun in the seventh, along with his twin, Dinah; Joseph was born that same year (Bekhor Shor).

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NJPS Jacob, "Give me children, or I shall die." [2]Jacob was incensed at Rachel, and said, "Can I take the place of God, who has denied you fruit of the womb?" [3]She said, "Here is my maid Bilhah. Consort with her, that she may bear on my knees and that through her I too may have children." [4]So she gave him her maid Bilhah as concubine, and Jacob cohabited with her. [5]Bilhah conceived and bore Jacob

הָבָה־לִּי בָנִים וְאִם־אַיִן מֵתָה אָנֹכִי׃
2 וַיִּחַר־אַף יַעֲקֹב בְּרָחֵל וַיֹּאמֶר הֲתַחַת
אֱלֹהִים אָנֹכִי אֲשֶׁר־מָנַע מִמֵּךְ פְּרִי־בָטֶן׃
3 וַתֹּאמֶר הִנֵּה אֲמָתִי בִלְהָה בֹּא אֵלֶיהָ
וְתֵלֵד עַל־בִּרְכַּי וְאִבָּנֶה גַם־אָנֹכִי מִמֶּנָּה׃
4 וַתִּתֶּן־לוֹ אֶת־בִּלְהָה שִׁפְחָתָהּ לְאִשָּׁה
וַיָּבֹא אֵלֶיהָ יַעֲקֹב׃ 5 וַתַּהַר בִּלְהָה וַתֵּלֶד

OJPS children, or else I die." [2]And Jacob's anger was kindled against Rachel; and he said: "Am I in God's stead, who hath withheld from thee the fruit of the womb?" [3]And she said: "Behold my maid Bilhah, go in unto her; that she may bear upon my knees, and I also may be builded up through her." [4]And she gave him Bilhah her handmaid to wife; and Jacob went in unto her. [5]And Bilhah conceived, and

RASHI deeds. She thought, "If she were not more righteous than I am, she would not have been blessed with children." **Give me children**. Is this what your father did to your mother? He didn't! He prayed for her. **Or I shall die**. From here we learn that a childless person is considered as one who is dead.

2 Can I take the place of God? OJPS translates more literally, NJPS idiomatically. **Who has denied you fruit of the womb**. You want me to do what my father did, but I am not like my father. My father did not have children, but I do. God denied *you*, not me.

3 That she may bear on my knees. That is, as Onkelos explains, "she will bear them and I will raise them," that is, adopt them. **And that through her I too may have children**. What did she mean by "too"? She was telling him, "Your grandfather Abraham had children by Hagar but still 'rolled up his sleeves' and did his best to help Sarah." He replied, "My grandmother herself brought her co-wife into her house." Rachel said, "If that is all that is stopping you, then 'here is my maid Bilhah. Consort with her that through her I too may have children'—just like Sarah."

RASHBAM **30:1 Or I shall die**. The ultimate accent marks it as a participle; contrast the same word in 48:7, with penultimate accent marking the perfect.

IBN EZRA **30:1 Give me children**. Pray to God as your father did.

2 Can I take the place of God? Perhaps he had in fact prayed but the time for his prayer to be heeded had not yet arrived.

3 I too may have children. See my comment to "perhaps I shall have a son" (16:2).

KIMHI **30:2 Can I take the place of God, who has denied you fruit of the womb?** "He denied you, not me—I've been doing my part." Had she merely asked him, "Beg mercy for me," she would have been acting correctly and he would not have gotten so angry.

3 Through her I too may have children. I too, like my sister, albeit through this other woman.

5 Bilhah conceived and bore Jacob a son. She bore him "to Jacob," as the Hebrew literally says, emphasizing that the four sons of the maidservants were Jacob's sons just as much as those of his wives. They would share in the blessing and the inheritance and produce commanders and magistrates just like the others.

NAHMANIDES **30:1 Give me children, or I shall die**. Rashi's comments are from a midrash. But why would Jacob get angry rather than pray for her? After all, God does hear the prayer of the righteous. True, it was Rachel who was prevented from having children, not Jacob himself, but do the righteous never pray for others? Elijah and Elisha certainly prayed for various women's children, and non-Jewish women at that. **[F]** This seems to be why our Sages were willing (in Genesis Rabbah) to have the Holy One say to Jacob, "Is this how you answer a woman who is distraught? I swear, your sons will one day have to present themselves to her son!" **[G]** But the straightforward sense is indeed that Rachel meant for Jacob to pray on her behalf and to get her children no matter what—otherwise, she would kill herself with grief. She spoke improperly out of her jealousy of her sister. She expected Jacob, out of his great love for her, to afflict himself, don sackcloth and ashes, and pray until she had children, so that she would not die of grief.

2 Jacob was incensed at Rachel. Even the righteous cannot count on their prayers being automatically answered. He was angry that she was trying to play on his feelings for her. **Can I take the place of God, who has denied you fruit of the womb?** Jacob told her that he was not responsible; *she* was denied, not he. He meant to rebuke her and shame her. When she saw that she could not count on Jacob's praying for her, that righteous woman went back to praying for herself to the One who listens when people cry out, as we know from the eventual response, "God heeded her" (v. 22). Perhaps we can modify the opinion of the Sages. For Jacob could not possibly refuse to pray for his own beloved but infertile wife. His prayer was simply not accepted. Then Rachel began to abuse him, begging for children and insisting that he could get them for her through prayer as his father had done. That is when he got angry at her. The matter was in God's hands, not his. His father's prayer had been answered because he was righteous and was due a son, but she, Rachel, had been denied fruit of the womb. That is the correct understanding.

5 Bilhah conceived and bore Jacob a son. Each time one of the maidservants gives birth, the text says that she bore a son "to Jacob." That is, he acknowledged them. The boys were not called "son of the maidservant" but "son of Jacob," just as Leah's and Rachel's sons were. That is also why we are told that Leah bore her fifth son (v. 17) and her sixth son (v. 19) "to Jacob" (see the Hebrew). He was thrilled with each and every one of them, even after having so many children. You will notice that the earlier sons are not numbered in this way.

[F] See 1 Kings 17:21 and 2 Kings 4:33. **[G]** As the other brothers do to Joseph in 43:15.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **30:1 Give me children, or I shall die**. Like the eunuch in Isa. 56:3 who says, "I am a withered tree" (Sforno).

2 Can I take the place of God? He was so angry at her that he actually did not let her finish speaking (Bekhor Shor). Rachel thought that Jacob was deliberately making sure she did not get pregnant, by coitus interruptus or some similar means; that is why he was so angry. But perhaps we can say more correctly that Rachel was insisting that he give her practical advice of some kind—which he could not do. See further my comment to 16:1 (Gersonides).

3 She said, "Here is my maid Bilhah." Failing any advice from Jacob, Rachel took her cue from what Sarah had done (Gersonides).

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NJPS a son. 6And Rachel said, "God has vindicated me; indeed, He has heeded my plea and given me a son." Therefore she named him Dan. 7Rachel's maid Bilhah conceived again and bore Jacob a second son. 8And Rachel said, "A fateful contest I waged with my sister; yes, and I have prevailed." So she named him Naphtali.

9When Leah saw that she had stopped bearing, she took her maid Zilpah and gave her to Jacob as concubine. 10And when Leah's maid Zilpah bore Jacob a son,

לְיַעֲקֹ֖ב בֵּֽן׃ 6 וַתֹּ֣אמֶר רָחֵ֗ל דָּנַ֤נִי אֱלֹהִים֙ וְגַם֙ שָׁמַ֣ע בְּקֹלִ֔י וַיִּתֶּן־לִ֖י בֵּ֑ן עַל־כֵּ֛ן קָרְאָ֥ה שְׁמ֖וֹ דָּֽן׃ 7 וַתַּ֥הַר עוֹד֙ וַתֵּ֣לֶד בִּלְהָ֔ה שִׁפְחַ֖ת רָחֵ֑ל בֵּ֖ן שֵׁנִ֥י לְיַעֲקֹֽב׃ 8 וַתֹּ֣אמֶר רָחֵ֗ל נַפְתּוּלֵ֤י אֱלֹהִים֙ | נִפְתַּ֣לְתִּי עִם־אֲחֹתִ֔י גַּם־יָכֹ֖לְתִּי וַתִּקְרָ֣א שְׁמ֑וֹ נַפְתָּלִֽי׃ 9 וַתֵּ֣רֶא לֵאָ֔ה כִּ֥י עָמְדָ֖ה מִלֶּ֑דֶת וַתִּקַּ֞ח אֶת־זִלְפָּ֤ה שִׁפְחָתָהּ֙ וַתִּתֵּ֣ן אֹתָ֔הּ לְיַעֲקֹ֖ב לְאִשָּֽׁה׃ 10 וַתֵּ֥לֶד זִלְפָּ֖ה שִׁפְחַ֣ת לֵאָ֑ה

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ In what sense has God "vindicated" Rachel (v. 6) with Dan's birth? ✦ What is the phrase "a fateful contest" (v. 7) supposed to teach us? ✦ In what sense has Rachel "prevailed," when both these boys were born to her maid and not to her? ✦ Why did Leah "take her maid Zilpah and give her to Jacob as concubine" (v. 9)? It is not normal for women to get their husbands to marry extra wives.

RASHI **6 God has vindicated me.** The Hebrew says merely "God has judged me" (compare OJPS), but NJPS understands Rachel's meaning correctly.

8 A fateful contest. Menahem b. Saruk explains *naphtulei* as if it were related to *petil* ("fastened down") in Num. 19:15. "I am 'connected' with my sister, through bonds forged by God, to merit bearing children." But I explain it via the word *petaltol* ("crooked") in Deut. 32:5. "I have 'twisted and turned,' urging God over and over again in my attempt to equal my sister." Onkelos connects it with *hitpallel* ("to pray"). "I have prayed the kind of prayers that the Holy One appreciates; my prayers have been accepted, and I have been answered, like my sister." There are also many midrashim that treat the verb *niphtalti* as if it were an acronym for a longer phrase. **Yes, and I have prevailed.** He agreed.

10 Leah's maid Zilpah bore Jacob a son. All the others are said first to have "conceived," but not Zilpah, who was still quite young, much more so than the others, and never became noticeably pregnant. That is why "Laban had given his maidservant Zilpah to his daughter Leah as her maid" (29:24) in the first place—to deceive Jacob when they brought Leah to him. For the usual custom was to give the older maid to the older daughter and the younger maid to the younger daughter.

OJPS bore Jacob a son. 6And Rachel said: "God hath judged me, and hath also heard my voice, and hath given me a son." Therefore called she his name Dan. 7And Bilhah Rachel's handmaid conceived again, and bore Jacob a second son. 8And Rachel said: "With mighty wrestlings have I wrestled with my sister, and have prevailed." And she called his name Naphtali.

9When Leah saw that she had left off bearing, she took Zilpah her handmaid, and gave her to Jacob to wife. 10And Zilpah Leah's handmaid bore Jacob a son.

RASHBAM **8 A fateful contest I waged.** Rather, "I have made a divine connection." The double Hebrew verb is from פתל; the נ on the first of them is merely echoing the נ of the second, Niphal verb. You will find the same phenomenon in the Hebrew of "*you were longing* for your father's house" (31:30) and "David *begged leave of me*" (1 Sam. 20:28).

IBN EZRA **8 A fateful contest.** The latter word is a noun formed from a Niphal verb; the root refers to being entangled with someone, as when a man is wrestling with someone and twists around him in order to take him down and defeat him. A metathesis of the same root gives us "and with the perverse You are *wily*" (2 Sam. 22:27). But Rachel is really saying, "a *godly* contest," meaning "I gave my maid to Jacob for God's sake," or "God helped me in my struggle."

KIMHI **6 God has vindicated me.** She invokes God rather than the Lord (as Leah did) because He had "judged" her (OJPS), and *elohim* ("God") can also mean "judges."

8 A fateful contest I waged with my sister. The Hebrew here, *naphtulei* and *niphtalti*, evokes two people entangled and wrestling together; the related word *petil* ("a cord") is so named because it consists of two threads twisted together to provide extra strength.

9 When Leah saw that she had stopped bearing, she took her maid Zilpah and gave her to Jacob as concubine. Again, their whole purpose was to have as many children as possible.

NAHMANIDES **9 When Leah saw that she had stopped bearing.** I do not know what this episode is about, or why Leah (who was not barren) would give her maid to Jacob to have children through her. It is not normal for wives to get extra wives for their husbands. But we must admit that these women were prophets, who knew that Jacob was intended to engender 12 tribes. Leah, then, wanted the majority of them to come from her (or her maid, who was under her authority). That way her sister would not outproduce her. That is why Leah said, "God has given me my reward for having given my maid to my husband" (v. 18). Indeed, that is why Jacob went to her, for (as the Sages tell us) he also knew that he was to have 12 sons. Perhaps, since Abraham and Isaac did not have many sons, Jacob wanted many wives to make sure his offspring could take possession of the land. For they were to return already "in the fourth generation" (15:16). Leah gave him her maid to make sure he did not take an outsider as a wife.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **6 God has vindicated me.** Rather, "God has judged me" (compare OJPS) for not praying to Him for children (Abarbanel). And He was right to prevent me from conceiving (Sforno). **He has heeded my plea.** Even though He was right, now He has accepted my prayer (Sforno). **And given me a son.** By acknowledging these sons as their own, Rachel and Leah implicitly agree that the maidservants are thereby freed. Otherwise, their children too would be slaves and not "sons"; see Exod. 21:4—the opposite of what Sarah did with Ishmael (Sforno).

8 A fateful contest I waged with my sister. Rather, the Holy One "linked" me with her, since her descendant Bezalel and my descendant Oholiab will work together on the Tabernacle (Hizkuni). Rather, "I have gone through all sorts of contortions" in competing with my sister—all the different methods she had tried to have children, including the roundabout one of having Bilhah bear her a son (Gersonides). **Yes, and I have prevailed.** Because she will not have a descendant working on Solomon's Temple, but I will have Hiram, "the son of a widow of the tribe of Naphtali" (1 Kings 7:13)—one of my tribes (Hizkuni).

9 When Leah saw that she had stopped bearing, she took her maid Zilpah and gave her to Jacob as concubine. Once Bilhah had children, she became one of the wives, leaving Zilpah by herself as a maidservant. But Leah had it in her power to remedy this (Abarbanel). This clearly happened before Naphtali was born; there could not otherwise be enough time in seven years for all these pregnancies (Sforno).

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NJPS [11]Leah said, "What luck!" So she named him Gad. [12]When Leah's maid Zilpah bore Jacob a second son, [13]Leah declared, "What fortune!" meaning, "Women will deem me fortunate." So she named him Asher.

[14]Once, at the time of the wheat harvest, Reuben came upon some mandrakes in the field and brought them to his mother Leah. Rachel said to Leah, "Please give me some of your son's mandrakes." [15]But she said to her, "Was it not enough

לְיַעֲקֹ֖ב בֵּֽן׃ 11 וַתֹּ֥אמֶר לֵאָ֖ה בגד בָּ֣א גָ֑ד
וַתִּקְרָ֥א אֶת־שְׁמ֖וֹ גָּֽד׃ 12 וַתֵּ֥לֶד זִלְפָּ֛ה
שִׁפְחַ֥ת לֵאָ֖ה בֵּ֥ן שֵׁנִ֖י לְיַעֲקֹֽב׃ 13 וַתֹּ֥אמֶר
לֵאָ֖ה בְּאָשְׁרָ֑י כִּ֤י אִשְּׁרֻ֙נִי֙ בָּנ֔וֹת וַתִּקְרָ֥א
אֶת־שְׁמ֖וֹ אָשֵֽׁר׃ רביעי
14 וַיֵּ֤לֶךְ רְאוּבֵן֙ בִּימֵ֣י קְצִיר־חִטִּ֔ים וַיִּמְצָ֥א
דוּדָאִ֖ים בַּשָּׂדֶ֑ה וַיָּבֵ֣א אֹתָ֔ם אֶל־לֵאָ֖ה אִמּ֑וֹ
וַתֹּ֤אמֶר רָחֵל֙ אֶל־לֵאָ֔ה תְּנִי־נָ֥א לִ֛י מִדּוּדָ֥אֵי
בְנֵ֖ךְ׃ 15 וַתֹּ֣אמֶר לָ֔הּ הַמְעַ֥ט קַחְתֵּ֖ךְ אֶת־

OJPS [11]And Leah said: "Fortune is come!" And she called his name Gad. [12]And Zilpah Leah's handmaid bore Jacob a second son. [13]And Leah said: "Happy am I! for the daughters will call me happy." And she called his name Asher.

[14]And Reuben went in the days of wheat harvest, and found mandrakes in the field, and brought them unto his mother Leah. Then Rachel said to Leah: "Give me, I pray thee, of thy son's mandrakes." [15]And she said unto her: "Is it a small matter that

RASHI **11 What luck!** More precisely, "Good fortune is come!" (compare OJPS). The word *gad* means "good fortune," as in "you who set a table for *Luck*" (Isa. 65:11). But a midrash relates it to the Aramaic verb in "*hew* down the tree" (Dan. 4:11,20) and says that Gad was born "hewn," that is, circumcised. All this is based on the way the text is supposed to be read; I have no idea what the way it is written—as a single word, *bgd*—is supposed to tell us. **[E]** According to the Masorah Magna, this is one of 15 places in the Bible that are written as one word but pronounced as two words.

14 At the time of the wheat harvest. This is said in praise of the tribes. Though it was harvest time, even as a child Reuben did not steal wheat or barley to bring to his mother, but took something that was growing wild, which no one owned. **Mandrakes.** Violets. It is a kind of plant. In Arabic this word means "jasmine."

15 I promise, he shall lie with you tonight. This was my night, but I'm giving it to

[E] Some texts of Rashi add the comment here that, written as one word, this means "he betrayed me"—" like a man who 'breaks faith with the wife of his youth'" (Mal. 2:15).

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why did she name her maid's son Gad, and what did she mean by saying (as the Hebrew of v. 11 literally says) "Gad has come"? ✦ Why is that phrase written, according to tradition, as a single word with no א? ✦ What made Leah think that "women will deem me fortunate" (v. 13) for giving her maid to her husband? What good would it do her or her sons for the maids to have more children? Other women would be more likely to deem her *un*fortunate!

RASHBAM **11 What luck!** "[Good] fortune is come [to us]" (see OJPS). Besides Isa. 65:11, B. Shab. 67b and Genesis Rabbah explain it that way as well. It is a mistake to relate it to *gedud* ("troop"). It is true that names are often related to words they merely sound like, but we should not do so unless the person giving the name has made the connection explicitly. Gad has one *d*, not two like *gedud*.

13 What fortune! Literally, "in my happiness," as if to say, "Here I stand in the happiness for which the other women praise me."

14 Mandrakes. These are actually figs; see Jer. 24:1, and note how they "yield their fragrance" in Song 7:14.

IBN EZRA **11 What luck!** The written text is simply the two words that one is supposed to read out loud formed into a compound word (and with the א missing). Compare "Babel" (11:9) a compound of *ba bel*, meaning "confusion came." The word *bamah* ("shrine") is a similar compound; see Ezek. 20:29, which explains it as such. **Gad.** Derived from *gedud* ("a troop"), for she had a troop of sons. But some say *gad* is a word for "good fortune," as in Arabic; they cite the phrase "who set a table for *Luck*" of Isa. 65:11, understanding that word as a name for Jupiter. But there too it refers to the "troops" of heaven.

13 What fortune! Rather, "for my happiness!"

14 Mandrakes. Onkelos too translates this word as "mandrakes"; they are called the same in Arabic. They have a beautiful fragrance, as indeed we find in "the mandrakes yield their fragrance" (Song 7:14). They mimic the human form, having a head and arms. But I do not know why they should be helpful in conceiving, since they are naturally cold.

15 In return for your son's mandrakes. That is, "in exchange" for them, as payment for them.

KIMHI **14 Reuben came upon some mandrakes in the field and brought them to his mother Leah.** He was about seven at the time. He may have heard people saying that they were helpful for getting pregnant. It is not true, however, or else why didn't Rachel get pregnant when she took them? Even Leah got pregnant again only because "God heeded" her (v. 17).

15 Was it not enough for you to take away my husband? "He is my husband just

NAHMANIDES **14 Mandrakes.** In Rashi's comment I find the suggestion that these were violets or jasmine. But it is not so. For what the Arabs call jasmine has exactly the same name in rabbinic Hebrew; see B. Shab. 50b. As for violets, they are not in season "at the time of the wheat harvest." I suppose he just happened to encounter them? It is better to accept Onkelos's interpretation that they are mandrakes, as R. Hiyya b. Abba does in Genesis Rabbah. Note that the same word is used for this plant in Aramaic as in Arabic; see Ibn Ezra's comment. As he notes, some think they are helpful for conception. But Rachel only wanted them for her own pleasure and enjoyment. She finally conceived through prayer, not through medicine. What Reuben brought was the branches of the mandrake, or perhaps the fruit, which looks like an apple and has a pleasant smell. He did not bring the root, which is the part that resembles a human being and the part that people say is an aid for conception. If that is true at all, it is a kind of good luck charm, not a natural process. I for one have never seen this mentioned in the medical texts about them.

15 Was it not enough for you to take away my husband? As if you were his wife and I were the maid! Now you also want to make yourself the chief wife and take away these mandrakes, whose fragrance I enjoy? — It may be that she wanted them for Jacob's

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **11 What luck!** *Bagad* is written as one word to evoke *bagad*, "betrayal." It was one thing for him to sleep with Rachel's maidservant, since she has no sons, but he should not have slept with my maidservant, even though I gave her to him (Hizkuni). I stopped bearing—but now my luck has returned. As for the betrayal, that refers to Laban's betrayal of Jacob, in which Zilpah—who as the younger looked as if she belonged to Rachel—was involved (Abarbanel). It happened by luck, by chance; I would never have intended this to happen if I had not stopped bearing. But pregnancy was "fickle" toward me [as Job 6:15 uses this Hebrew word] (Sforno).

15 Was it not enough for you to take away my husband? When Leah stopped bearing, Jacob stopped sleeping with her as often, thinking she had stopped bearing permanently (Abarbanel).

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NJPS for you to take away my husband, that you would also take my son's mandrakes?" Rachel replied, "I promise, he shall lie with you tonight, in return for your son's mandrakes." [16]When Jacob came home from the field in the evening, Leah went out to meet him and said, "You are to sleep with me, for I have hired you with my son's mandrakes." And he lay with her that night. [17]God heeded Leah, and she conceived and bore him a fifth son. [18]And Leah said, "God has given me my reward for having given my maid to my husband." So she named him Issachar. [19]When Leah conceived again and bore Jacob a sixth son, [20]Leah said, "God has given me a choice gift; this time my husband will exalt me, for I have borne him six sons." So she

OJPS thou hast taken away my husband? and wouldest thou take away my son's mandrakes also?" And Rachel said: "Therefore he shall lie with thee to-night for thy son's mandrakes." [16]And Jacob came from the field in the evening, and Leah went out to meet him, and said: "Thou must come in unto me; for I have surely hired thee with my son's mandrakes." And he lay with her that night. [17]And God hearkened unto Leah, and she conceived, and bore Jacob a fifth son. [18]And Leah said: "God hath given me my hire, because I gave my handmaid to my husband." And she called his name Issachar. [19]And Leah conceived again, and bore a sixth son to Jacob. [20]And Leah said: "God hath endowed me with a good dowry; now will my husband dwell with me, because I have borne him six sons." And she called his

אִישִׁי וְלָקְחַת גַּם אֶת־דּוּדָאֵי בְנִי וַתֹּאמֶר רָחֵל לָכֵן יִשְׁכַּב עִמָּךְ הַלַּיְלָה תַּחַת דּוּדָאֵי בְנֵךְ׃ 16 וַיָּבֹא יַעֲקֹב מִן־הַשָּׂדֶה בָּעֶרֶב וַתֵּצֵא לֵאָה לִקְרָאתוֹ וַתֹּאמֶר אֵלַי תָּבוֹא כִּי שָׂכֹר שְׂכַרְתִּיךָ בְּדוּדָאֵי בְנִי וַיִּשְׁכַּב עִמָּהּ בַּלַּיְלָה הוּא׃ 17 וַיִּשְׁמַע אֱלֹהִים אֶל־לֵאָה וַתַּהַר וַתֵּלֶד לְיַעֲקֹב בֵּן חֲמִישִׁי׃ 18 וַתֹּאמֶר לֵאָה נָתַן אֱלֹהִים שְׂכָרִי אֲשֶׁר־נָתַתִּי שִׁפְחָתִי לְאִישִׁי וַתִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ יִשָּׂשכָר׃ 19 וַתַּהַר עוֹד לֵאָה וַתֵּלֶד בֵּן־שִׁשִּׁי לְיַעֲקֹב׃ 20 וַתֹּאמֶר לֵאָה זְבָדַנִי אֱלֹהִים | אֹתִי זֵבֶד טוֹב הַפַּעַם יִזְבְּלֵנִי אִישִׁי כִּי־יָלַדְתִּי לוֹ שִׁשָּׁה בָנִים וַתִּקְרָא

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why would Leah think that giving her maid to her husband would be an act for which "God has given me my reward" (v. 18)? ✦ A similar question arises in the naming of Zebulun. Why would it be that "this time my husband will exalt me" (v. 20)? ✦ Why does Leah mention the total number of children she has so far borne only with Levi ("three," 29:34) and Zebulun ("six," here in v. 20)? ✦ Similarly, why does the text number only two of the sons—Issachar, "fifth" (v. 17) and Zebulun, "sixth" (v. 19)—and not the others?

RASHI you for your son's mandrakes. — For treating her turn to sleep with this righteous man in such an offhand manner, she was denied the privilege of being buried with him.

16 I have hired you. I gave Rachel her *sakhar,* her pay. **And he lay with her that night.** More precisely, "And he lay with her at night. He [the Holy One]…" arranged that Issachar should result from this.

17 God heeded Leah. Who so intensely wanted to produce more of the tribes.

20 A choice gift. Rather, "a choice portion" (compare OJPS). **This time my husband will exalt me.** The Hebrew is related to "a stately house" (1 Kings 8:13). "From now on, Jacob's primary home will be with me. I have as many sons as all the rest of his wives put together."

RASHBAM **18 Issachar.** Note the unique double *ש* of the Hebrew name, indicating a double reward (*sachar*)—one for the mandrakes, and one **for having given my maid to my husband.**

20 A choice gift. The meaning "a good share" or "portion" would seem to fit the context best.

IBN EZRA **20 God has given me a choice gift.** The verb is a hapax legomenon, unrelated to any other word in the Bible. **This time my husband will exalt me.** Rather, he will "dwell" with me (OJPS)—he will live permanently with me. Compare "I have now built for You a House of *habitation,* a place where You may dwell forever" (1 Kings 8:13). For the assumed preposition "with" in a form that usually marks the object of the verb, compare "my children have gone forth *from* me" (Jer. 10:20) and "May Your steadfast love come *to* me" (Ps. 119:41). Note that none of these verbs can take a direct object.

KIMHI as much as yours." But since Rachel did not have children, Jacob slept more often with her, to mollify her.

16 Leah went out to meet him. Again, this whole story is to demonstrate that the Matriarchs all wanted to bear Jacob's children, since he was so righteous. It was not about sex. **That night.** The noun has the definite article but the adjective is missing it. But there are many similar examples; see the Hebrew of (e.g.) "one lamb" (Num. 28:4); "the new cart" (2 Sam. 6:3).

20 God has given me a choice gift. The object "me" is repeated in the Hebrew, either for emphasis or to say "God has given me a choice gift *from* [*within*] *myself.*"

NAHMANIDES sake, to freshen his bed, as women do: "I have sprinkled my bed with myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon" (Prov. 7:17). That is what Leah is saying: "Was it not enough for you to take away my husband, that you would also take my son's mandrakes to seduce him with?" But others say mandrakes are an aphrodisiac, *duda'im* being related to *dodim,* as in "your time for *love*" (Ezek. 16:8). My explanation of Leah's remark would still hold in this case.

20 God has given me a choice gift. No one has found any biblical source for this verb *zabad*; it may be that we should think of it as a compound word, *zeh bad,* like *bagad,* the written form of what Leah says in v. 11. (The vowels *e* and *a* alternate frequently, especially in compound words.) If so, then *bad* means "branch," as in "make *poles* of acacia wood" (Exod. 25:13) and "it produced *branches*" (Ezek. 17:6). A "branch" can also be a metaphor for children. Leah, then, is saying that God has given her a good "branch" for her husband to shelter under. **This time my husband will exalt me.** Here too the verb really means something more like "dwell with me" (OJPS). "He will take shelter in my shade." The same root is found in "I have now built for You a *stately* House, a place where You May dwell forever" (1 Kings 8:13), where the "stately" House built by Solomon is really a "sheltering" House. Solomon said this to speak respectfully of the Holy One; he of course knew that "the heavens to their uttermost reaches cannot contain You, how much less this House that I have built! (1 Kings 8:27). We find it again in "Sun [and] moon stand still in their *habitation*" (Hab. 3:11); remember that we find the image of the sun "dwelling" somewhere also in "He placed in them a tent for the sun" (Ps. 19:5).

I did not understand Onkelos's translation of "choice gift" as "a good portion" until I saw the translation in the Jerusalem Targum **[H]**

[H] None of the Aramaic versions we have use this translation.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **20 This time my husband will exalt me, for I have borne him six sons.** She understood this to mean that she had gotten two of the four divisions of Jacob's sons (Abarbanel).

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NJPS named him Zebulun. [21]Last, she bore him a daughter, and named her Dinah.

[22]Now God remembered Rachel; God heeded her and opened her womb. [23]She conceived and bore a son, and said, "God has taken away my disgrace." [24]So she named him Joseph, which is to say, "May the LORD add another son for me."

[25]After Rachel had borne Joseph, Jacob said to Laban, "Give me leave to go back to

אֶת־שְׁמוֹ זְבֻלוּן׃ 21 וְאַחַר יָלְדָה בַּת וַתִּקְרָא אֶת־שְׁמָהּ דִּינָה׃
22 וַיִּזְכֹּר אֱלֹהִים אֶת־רָחֵל וַיִּשְׁמַע אֵלֶיהָ אֱלֹהִים וַיִּפְתַּח אֶת־רַחְמָהּ׃ 23 וַתַּהַר וַתֵּלֶד בֵּן וַתֹּאמֶר אָסַף אֱלֹהִים אֶת־חֶרְפָּתִי׃ 24 וַתִּקְרָא אֶת־שְׁמוֹ יוֹסֵף לֵאמֹר יֹסֵף יְהוָה לִי בֵּן אַחֵר׃
25 וַיְהִי כַּאֲשֶׁר יָלְדָה רָחֵל אֶת־יוֹסֵף וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב אֶל־לָבָן שַׁלְּחֵנִי וְאֵלְכָה אֶל־מְקוֹמִי

OJPS name Zebulun. [21]And afterwards she bore a daughter, and called her name Dinah.

[22]And God remembered Rachel, and God hearkened to her, and opened her womb. [23]And she conceived, and bore a son, and said: "God hath taken away my reproach." [24]And she called his name Joseph, saying: "The LORD add to me another son."

[25]And it came to pass, when Rachel had borne Joseph, that Jacob said unto Laban: "Send me away, that I may go unto mine

RASHI **21 Dinah.** Our Sages explain the name: Leah reasoned [*dan din*], "If this is a male, only one of the 12 is left for Rachel, and she will have fewer sons even than the maids." So she prayed and it was changed to a female.

22 Now God remembered Rachel. He remembered that she had given the sign to her sister, and that she was distressed that she would fall to Esau's lot if Jacob divorced her because she had no children. Esau had the same idea when he heard that she had no children, as the poet tells us. **[F]**

23 God has taken away. Literally, He has "gathered it in" to a place where it cannot be seen. See similarly "not *having been brought* indoors" (Exod. 9:19); "*Take away* our disgrace!" (Isa. 4:1); "Your sun shall set no more, your moon no more *withdraw*" (Isa. 60:20); "stars *withdraw* their brightness" (Joel 4:15). **My disgrace.** That I was barren and everyone said I would fall to the lot of Esau the wicked. — A midrash: As long as a woman remains childless, she has no one on whom to blame her own bad behavior. Once she has a son, she can blame him: "Who broke this container?" her husband asks. "Your son!" "Who ate these figs?" "Your son!"

24 May the LORD add another son for me. She knew by prophecy that Jacob would produce only 12 tribes. She thought, "May it be God's will that the one remaining son shall come from me." That is why she prayed for only one "other son."

25 After Rachel had borne Joseph. That is, once Esau's nemesis was born: "The House of Jacob shall be fire, and the House of Joseph flame, and the House of Esau shall be straw" (Obad. 1:18). Fire without flame cannot go far. Once Joseph was born, Jacob trusted in the Holy One and wanted to return.

[F] Rashi quotes a line from a liturgical poem recited on the first day of the Jewish new year.

RASHBAM **21 And named her Dinah.** But no expression of gratitude and praise for her birth is written in the text to let us know why she was given that name. Parents are not as grateful for girls as they are for boys. The reason this is mentioned in the text at all is to inform you that all of Jacob's children were males except for her. The same is true of "the name of Asher's daughter was Serah" (Num. 26:46). **[D]**

23 God has taken away my disgrace. For the verb, compare "you shall *bring it into* your home" (Deut. 22:2) and "For I have *withdrawn* My favor from that people" (Jer. 16:5), both referring to taking something out of public view. "You have brought in and hidden my disgrace—that I was called barren."

24 So she named him Joseph. Because God had taken away—*asaph*—her disgrace. Why then did she not name him Asaph? Where does the "J" of Joseph (*y* in Hebrew) come from? From her prayer: **May the LORD add another son for me.** "May He add" is *yoseph* in Hebrew. So this name is a combination of both things she said.

25 Give me leave to go back. Now that Joseph has been born, the seven years for Rachel have been fulfilled.

[D] Our text of Rashbam's comment adds, "Of all the 70 people from Jacob's family who went down to Egypt, only two were girls: Jochebed and Serah." But his comment to 46:8 takes Jochebed's inclusion in the list to be midrashic.

NAHMANIDES and realized that they were treating the *v* sound in the word as if it had been written with ו and not with ב. In fact this interchange does occur; compare 3:6 with Ps. 119:20, Isa. 50:6 with Ps. 129:3, Jon. 2:7 with Ps. 48:11, 1 Chron. 26:18 with 2 Kings 23:11, and so forth. There are examples in rabbinic literature as well. She would thus be saying that the Holy One had made provision for her with "a good portion." Her husband would make his primary dwelling with her because of how many sons she had. She would be well taken care of because that would best please him.

23 God has taken away my disgrace. See the comments of Rashi and Ibn Ezra. As Onkelos correctly understands, the verb really means that God has "collected" her disgrace. It will no longer be scattered about among people gossiping in the street.

IBN EZRA **21 Last, she bore him a daughter.** Some say this daughter was Zebulun's twin sister.

23 God has taken away my disgrace. Some take the verb to mean "excised," as it is used in "rejoicing and gladness *are gone* from the farm land" (Isa. 16:10). Others understand it this way: "The Holy One saw the disrespect with which the other women have been treating me because I was barren, which has now, as it were, been *confiscated* by the Holy One." In any case, 12 children were born to Jacob in seven years. When our predecessors did the math, they came up with an average pregnancy of six months and some days each. But it is possible that Leah gave her maid to Jacob before Naphtali was born, and that Rachel gave birth before Zebulun was born. And after all we have no idea when Dinah was born.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **21 Last, she bore him a daughter, and named her Dinah.** Since it does not say she conceived again, evidently Zebulun and Dinah were twins (Bekhor Shor). Leah had become arrogant since all her children were boys; Dinah ("judgment") came to her by way of punishment. And of course she had participated in deceiving Jacob originally (Abarbanel).

22 Now God remembered Rachel. Responding immediately to what Leah imagined, that she had gotten Rachel's share of the 12 sons (Abarbanel).

23 God has taken away my disgrace. The disgrace of having him accept my sister's prayer and not mine (Sforno).

24 May the LORD add another son for me. This too teaches us that the Matriarchs knew how many sons Jacob was to have. Rachel understood that she could not expect to have more than one additional son (Abarbanel).

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NJPS my own homeland. [26]Give me my wives and my children, for whom I have served you, that I may go; for well you know what services I have rendered you." [27]But Laban said to him, "If you will indulge me, I have learned by divination that the LORD has blessed me on your account." [28]And he continued, "Name the wages due from me, and I will pay you." [29]But he said, "You know well how I have served you and how your livestock has fared with me. [30]For the little you had before I came has grown to much, since the LORD has blessed you wherever I turned. And now, when shall I make provision for my own

OJPS own place, and to my country. [26]Give me my wives and my children for whom I have served thee, and let me go; for thou knowest my service wherewith I have served thee." [27]And Laban said unto him: "If now I have found favor in thine eyes—I have observed the signs, and the LORD hath blessed me for thy sake." [28]And he said: "Appoint me thy wages, and I will give it." [29]And he said unto him: "Thou knowest how I have served thee, and how thy cattle have fared with me. [30]For it was little which thou hadst before I came, and it hath increased abundantly; and the LORD hath blessed thee whithersoever I turned. And now when shall I provide for mine own house

כו וְלַאֲרָצִי׃ 26 תְּנָה אֶת־נָשַׁי וְאֶת־יְלָדַי אֲשֶׁר
עָבַדְתִּי אֹתְךָ בָּהֶן וְאֵלֵכָה כִּי אַתָּה יָדַעְתָּ
אֶת־עֲבֹדָתִי אֲשֶׁר עֲבַדְתִּיךָ׃ 27 וַיֹּאמֶר
אֵלָיו לָבָן אִם־נָא מָצָאתִי חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ
נִחַשְׁתִּי וַיְבָרְכֵנִי יְהוָה בִּגְלָלֶךָ׃ 28 וַיֹּאמֶר
נָקְבָה שְׂכָרְךָ עָלַי וְאֶתֵּנָה׃ 29 וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו
אַתָּה יָדַעְתָּ אֵת אֲשֶׁר עֲבַדְתִּיךָ וְאֵת
אֲשֶׁר־הָיָה מִקְנְךָ אִתִּי׃ 30 כִּי מְעַט אֲשֶׁר־
הָיָה לְךָ לְפָנַי וַיִּפְרֹץ לָרֹב וַיְבָרֶךְ יְהוָה
אֹתְךָ לְרַגְלִי וְעַתָּה מָתַי אֶעֱשֶׂה גַּם־אָנֹכִי

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why did Jacob say to Laban, "Give me my wives and my children" (v. 26)? Didn't he have them already? ✦ Why does Laban say, "if you will indulge me" (v. 27)? What does that have to do with "divination"? ✦ Why does Laban have to "continue" (v. 28) when he is already speaking? ✦ Why does Laban tell Jacob, "Name the wages due from me," when all Jacob asked for was his wives and children? ✦ Why does Jacob insist, "You know well how I have served you" (v. 29), when Laban has already acknowledged it? ✦ Why does he ask, "when shall I make provision for my own household?" (v. 30), after Laban has agreed to pay him?

RASHI **26 Give me my wives.** I do not want to leave without permission.

27 I have learned by divination. For he was a diviner. "I have determined by divination that it was through you that blessing came to me. When you arrived, I had no sons." For we read, "there is his daughter Rachel, coming with the flock" (29:6). Now, if he had sons, is it possible that he would send his daughter out with the shepherds? But he certainly had sons now, for Jacob "heard the things that Laban's sons were saying" (31:1).

28 Name the wages. As Onkelos puts it, "specify" them.

29 How your livestock has fared with me. Rather, "*what* your livestock *was* with me"—the miniscule number of them that came to me to begin with.

30 Wherever I turned. Literally, "at my foot." Compare "all the people *who follow you*" (Exod. 11:8); "to the men who *are following me*" (Judg. 8:5). Blessing followed in my wake. **And now, when shall I make provision for my own household?** More precisely,

IBN EZRA **26 Give me my wives and my children, for whom I have served you.** "For whom I have served you" refers to the wives, not to the children.

27 I have learned by divination. That is, "I have tested it by divination." He was accustomed to go to diviners. And of course he had teraphim, which are used for divination.

28 Name the wages. That is, state them explicitly: "you shall be called by a new name which the LORD Himself shall *pronounce*" (Isa. 62:2). For the form of our word, compare the lengthened imperative in "*remember* me favorably for this" (Neh. 13:14).

30 Wherever I turned. Literally, "for the sake of my foot." The Hebrew idiom is

RASHBAM **30 Wherever I turned.** Literally, "at my foot," but that is an idiomatic way of saying "for my sake."

KIMHI **26 Give me my wives and my children.** Who, like everything else of mine, are in your house and under your control.

27 I have learned by divination that the LORD has blessed me on your account. So I want you to stay longer with me.

NAHMANIDES **27 I have learned by divination that the LORD has blessed me on your account.** More precisely, "I have learned by observation" (compare OJPS). This is the essential meaning of the Hebrew verb. Laban realized that he had been blessed on account of Jacob's righteousness. But some think Laban was indeed divining, by using the teraphim ("household idols") of 31:19.

29 And how your livestock has fared with me. If Rashi's comment is correct, the Hebrew is a bit awkward. The translations have understood the expression "that which" in both cases in the verse as "how," which is a workable explanation: "You know how I have served you—with all my might. And how long I have spent with your livestock, and how few they were before I arrived, especially in comparison to how incredibly many there are now! But 'It is the blessing of the LORD that enriches, and no toil can increase it' [Prov. 10:22]. This blessing came to you when 'my foot' (see the next comment) entered your home." This is the correct explanation.

30 The LORD has blessed you wherever I turned. Rather, "at my foot"; out of modesty, he did not want to say "on my account," as Laban had in v. 27. He is saying, "The Lord has blessed you ever since my foot entered your home." **And now, when shall I make provision for my own household?** Despite Rashi's comment, we have not seen that Jacob has any sheep of his own to be taken care of

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **26 Give me my wives and my children, for whom I have served you.** He had served Laban for the wives, of course, which is why the suffix is feminine; but he wanted the wives for the sake of having children, who were therefore the ultimate reason of his service (Gersonides). He did not yet have any livestock, but at least he had enough to support the family; he would obviously not set out on a journey if he thought they were going to die of hunger. Nor would Laban have agreed to it. But Laban does not make that objection; he wants Jacob to stay for Laban's own good (Sforno).

27 I have learned by divination. From the household idols that Rachel would steal (Hizkuni). Rather, by consideration and judgment, just as Eliezer does in Genesis 24 and as Jonathan does in 1 Samuel 14 (Gersonides).

28 And he continued. The Hebrew repeats "and he said" (OJPS) of v. 27 after the parenthetical remark given there; this is a frequent occurrence in the Bible (Hizkuni).

29 You know well how I have served you and how your livestock has fared with me. It has nothing to do with divination or luck, but with my own hard and skillful work. Whenever an animal was sick or injured, I healed them, as a trained shepherd does (Sforno).

30 Since the LORD has blessed you wherever I turned. That aspect of what you said is undoubtedly true (Sforno).

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NJPS household?" [31]He said, "What shall I pay you?" And Jacob said, "Pay me nothing! If you will do this thing for me, I will again pasture and keep your flocks: [32]let me pass through your whole flock today, removing from there every speckled and spotted animal—every dark-colored sheep and every spotted and speckled

לְבֵיתִי׃ [31] וַיֹּאמֶר מָה אֶתֶּן־לָךְ וַיֹּאמֶר
יַעֲקֹב לֹא־תִתֶּן־לִי מְאוּמָה אִם־תַּעֲשֶׂה־
לִּי הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה אָשׁוּבָה אֶרְעֶה צֹאנְךָ
אֶשְׁמֹר׃ [32] אֶעֱבֹר בְּכָל־צֹאנְךָ הַיּוֹם הָסֵר
מִשָּׁם כָּל־שֶׂה ׀ נָקֹד וְטָלוּא וְכָל־שֶׂה־חוּם
בַּכְּשָׂבִים וְטָלֻא וְנָקֹד בָּעִזִּים וְהָיָה שְׂכָרִי׃

OJPS also?" [31]And he said: "What shall I give thee?" And Jacob said: "Thou shalt not give me aught; if thou wilt do this thing for me, I will again feed thy flock and keep it. [32]I will pass through all thy flock to-day, removing from thence every speckled and spotted one, and every dark one among the sheep, and the spotted and speckled among the goats; and of such

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ When Laban says again, "What shall I pay you?" why does Jacob say, "Pay me nothing!" (v. 31)?

RASHI "when shall I too act for [the needs of] my household?" No one is working for my household now except my sons. Now I must act "also" (OJPS), working with them and supporting them. — That is what "also" is doing in this sentence.

32 Speckled. With small spots. **Spotted**. With bigger ones. **Dark-colored**. Reddish. **Such shall be my wages**. The spotted and speckled goats and the dark-colored sheep—all that are born from now on shall be mine. So you must separate the ones that are already like that and put them in your sons' charge. That way, you will not be able to say about the ones to be born, "They were there already." You also will not be able to claim, "They were sired by my speckled and spotted ones."

RASHBAM **31 Pay me nothing!** Nothing from all the sheep that you now have, since I have been serving you for your daughters. **I will again pasture and keep your flocks**. But from those born from now on, pay me the streaked and speckled ones.

32 Removing from there every speckled and spotted animal. Rather, "[you] remove from there every speckled and spotted animal" and hand them over to your sons, separating them from the ones that will be born from now on, which will be my wages. — As for these difficult adjectives, I believe *nakod* is not "speckled" but "freckled," referring specifically to spots on the head and neck. Note the resemblance of this word to the verb *vayyikkod* (as in "Moses hastened *to bow low* to the ground," Exod. 34:8), which means to bow the head and neck. The נ of our word, missing from that verb, is indicated by the *dagesh* in the ק, as is normal. In fact, both words are related to *kodkod* ("head"), just as *akod* ("streaked," in v. 35) is related to *vayya-'akod* (as in "he *bound* his son Isaac," 22:9), referring to tying the feet. **Such shall be my wages**. Once you remove them for your own use, any sheep of such kind that are born from now on shall be my wages.

NAHMANIDES by his sons—the oldest of whom is maybe six at this point. (Laban may well have had sons younger than Rachel, who would be old enough now to work as shepherds, but Jacob's sons were definitely not old enough yet.) Perhaps Jacob means "I" in addition not to his sons but to his wives and servants? But no. The correct explanation is, as the translations put it, "When shall I make provision for my *own* household as I have for yours?" The Hebrew does look as if it means "I too," but we often find "too" modifying not the word it is next to but some other word in the sentence; see my comment to 29:30.

32 Every speckled and spotted animal. Every animal that is "speckled *or* spotted." **Every dark-colored sheep**. I do not think this can literally mean "dark-colored," as the commentators say. Most of these animals are dark-colored, especially in the east (which is so hot), which would mean that they would all belong to Jacob. Onkelos's opinion that the Hebrew word means "reddish" is the correct understanding; Rashi says the same. It is related to a word used in Hebrew to describe the reddening sun. **Such shall be my wages**. See the comments of Rashi and Ibn Ezra. In my opinion, NJPS is misleading; he is naming "every speckled and spotted and reddish sheep" as well as "every spotted and speckled goat." Notice that he did not use reddish rods with the sheep (see v. 40); if these were the only sheep he was to get, he would lose his wages from them—though they are the more valuable animals of the flock. Moreover, in the dream he describes to Rachel and Leah in 31:10–13, there are no "dark-colored" animals. Correctly understood, his wages were to be three kinds of sheep (spotted, speckled, and dark-colored) and two kinds of goat (spotted and speckled).

IBN EZRA that someone has a "lucky foot." In our case, the sense is: "You have been blessed from the moment I arrived in your household."

31 Nothing. The *-ah* ending of *me'umah* is extraneous, since the same word is found in the same meaning without it. **[E]**

32 Every speckled and spotted animal. The translations are correct about "speckled"; "spotted" is a general word for all such markings. It is related to the "worn-out, *patched* sandals" of Josh. 9:5. The phrase literally says "lamb," not "animal," but note that in Hebrew the word can refer to goats as well. See the Hebrew of "the sheep and the goat" (Deut. 14:4). Having referred in general to "spotted" animals, the text then adds further details. **Dark-colored**. The Hebrew word is related to the word for heat, which may indeed be the reason they were dark-colored; dark colors are hotter than light ones. **Every spotted and speckled goat**. "Speckled" here, again, is just one example of how the animals might be "spotted."

[E] Perhaps Ibn Ezra is thinking of "If . . . a *stain* sullied my hands" (Job 31:7), taking it to mean "If . . . *anything* sullied my hands." NJPS derives that word from *mum* ("a blemish").

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **31 What shall I pay you?** Laban realized that Jacob no longer wanted to work for him at all, but to care for his own flock (Gersonides). Laban understood that the wives were not enough recompense for the additional blessing Jacob had brought him (Abarbanel). **Pay me nothing!** Since my wages will be the kinds of animals that are never naturally born (Bekhor Shor). Pay me nothing for the work I have already done, which was for my wife (Hizkuni). No matter what you owe me for the past—I am waiving that amount (Abarbanel). **If you will do this thing for me, I will again pasture and keep your flocks**. But if you want me to keep working for you, I will do so under the following conditions (Hizkuni).

32 Removing from there every speckled and spotted animal. More precisely, "every speckled and spotted *young* one," leaving some of the grown ones to produce the varieties that will accrue to me (Sforno).

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NJPS goat. Such shall be my wages. 33In the future when you go over my wages, let my honesty toward you testify for me: if there are among my goats any that are not speckled or spotted or any sheep that are not dark-colored, they got there by theft." 34And Laban said, "Very well, let it be as you say."

35But that same day he removed the streaked and spotted he-goats and all the speckled and spotted she-goats—every one that had white on it—and all the dark-colored sheep, and left them in the charge

33 וְעָנְתָה־בִּי צִדְקָתִי בְּיוֹם מָחָר כִּי־תָבוֹא
עַל־שְׂכָרִי לְפָנֶיךָ כֹּל אֲשֶׁר־אֵינֶנּוּ נָקֹד
וְטָלוּא בָּעִזִּים וְחוּם בַּכְּשָׂבִים גָּנוּב הוּא
אִתִּי׃ 34 וַיֹּאמֶר לָבָן הֵן לוּ יְהִי כִדְבָרֶךָ׃
35 וַיָּסַר בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא אֶת־הַתְּיָשִׁים
הָעֲקֻדִּים וְהַטְּלֻאִים וְאֵת כָּל־הָעִזִּים
הַנְּקֻדּוֹת וְהַטְּלָאֹת כֹּל אֲשֶׁר־לָבָן בּוֹ וְכֹל־

OJPS shall be my hire. 33So shall my righteousness witness against me hereafter, when thou shalt come to look over my hire that is before thee: every one that is not speckled and spotted among the goats, and dark among the sheep, that if found with me shall be counted stolen." 34And Laban said: "Behold, would it might be according to thy word."

35And he removed that day the he-goats that were streaked and spotted, and all the she-goats that were speckled and spotted, every one that had white in it, and all the dark ones among the sheep, and gave them

RASHI **33 Let my honesty toward you testify for me.** If you suspect I am taking anything of yours, my honesty will testify for me: **If there are among my goats any that are not speckled or spotted or any sheep that are not dark-colored, they got there by theft.**

34 Very well. That is, "I accept your suggestion." **Let it be as you say.** If only you would be satisfied with just that!

35 He-goats. [G] Every one that had white on it. White marks of any kind.

[G] The translations follow Rashi's comment that this rare word refers to males only.

RASHBAM **33 My honesty.** Today and in the future. **Toward you.** Rather, "before" you, when you come to see my wages and find none but speckled and streaked ones. **Or any sheep that are not dark-colored.** This did not apply to the goats, since most goats are dark-colored. **[E]**

35 And left them in the charge of his sons. Of Laban's sons.

[E] So Jacob would not get dark-colored goats as part of his wages.

KIMHI **34 Let it be as you say.** Don't change your mind. — For Laban assumed that when the parents did not have those characteristics, only a few of the offspring would have them.

35 But that same day he removed the streaked and spotted he-goats. "Streaked" ones are speckled only on the legs; Laban removed even these. It goes without saying that he removed those that were speckled all over. **And left them in the charge of his sons.** He was afraid that otherwise his own speckled ones would wander over to Jacob's flock and mingle with them, and then Jacob would claim them.

IBN EZRA **33 Goats.** In v. 35 this word refers specifically to she-goats; here it refers to goats of both sexes. **Speckled or spotted.** Either speckled, or spotted in any of the other possible ways.

35 But that same day he removed the streaked and spotted he-goats. "Streaked" really means "banded" around the legs—where an animal would be "bound" (as the Hebrew word really means). We see from 31:10 that "spotted" refers here to those that were speckled or mottled; "mottled" comes from the word for "hail" and means that they were marked with white spots. **The speckled and spotted she-goats.** Here "spotted" refers to those that were "streaked" (banded) or mottled, that is, **every one that had white on it. And all the dark-colored sheep.** More precisely, "all the dark ones among the sheep" (OJPS), though the Hebrew merely says "all the darks among the sheep." It is an adjective being used as a noun. **And left them in the charge of his sons.** A great scholar says that it was Jacob who "removed" these animals, having said that "such shall be my wages" (v. 32), and that "his sons" here are Jacob's sons. But this is wrong. Jacob had no son older than Reuben, who could not yet have reached age seven.

The passage is to be explained as follows: The Hebrew word translated "removing" in v. 32 is not a gerund but an imperative. Jacob is telling Laban to remove these animals. When he says, "Such shall be my wages" (v. 32), he is saying, "Any such after you have removed the ones that are here now." By saying, "Let my honesty toward you testify for me" (v. 33), he was telling Laban, as that verse continues, that if Laban finds any other kind of animals in Jacob's own flock, "they got there by theft. After all, you have already removed all the spotted animals that belong to you." As NJPS makes clear, it was Laban who "removed" the spotted animals in v. 35 and (obviously) Laban who "put a distance of three days' journey between himself and Jacob" (v. 36).

NAHMANIDES **33 If there are among my goats any that are not speckled or spotted or any sheep that are not dark-colored.** That is, any goats that are not speckled or spotted; any sheep that are not either speckled or spotted or "dark-colored" (reddish; see my comment to this word in v. 32).

35 But that same day he removed the streaked and spotted he-goats and all the speckled and spotted she-goats—every one that had white on it. Jacob had told him to remove merely the she-goats, but Laban was worried about the father's seed as well, so he removed not only the speckled and spotted males but even the streaked ones, who had just a slight band of white on their legs. **And all the dark-colored sheep.** The "reddish" ones, in addition to the speckled and spotted ones. The reason they added reddish sheep to his wages is that sheep are not naturally spotted, any more than goats are naturally reddish.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **33 In the future.** Literally, "on the day of tomorrow"; the expression also occurs only in "Do not boast of tomorrow" of Prov. 27:1 (Masorah).

35 But that same day he removed the streaked and spotted he-goats and all the speckled and spotted she-goats. Cheating him on a vast scale—which is why Jacob pulled the trick with the rods (Hizkuni). Despite agreeing, "let it be as you say" (v. 34), Laban took all the animals of those kinds, young and old (Sforno). **And left them in the charge of his sons.** Since Laban's sons could take care of these sheep, they could certainly have taken care of all his sheep. Evidently he only hired Jacob because he realized that Jacob brought him blessing (Bekhor Shor).

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NJPS of his sons. 36And he put a distance of three days' journey between himself and Jacob, while Jacob was pasturing the rest of Laban's flock.

37Jacob then got fresh shoots of poplar, and of almond and plane, and peeled white stripes in them, laying bare the white of the shoots. 38The rods that he had peeled he set up in front of the goats in the troughs, the water receptacles, that the goats came to drink from. Their mating occurred when they came to drink, 39and since the goats mated by the rods, the goats

OJPS into the hand of his sons. 36And he set three days' journey betwixt himself and Jacob. And Jacob fed the rest of Laban's flocks.

37And Jacob took him rods of fresh poplar, and of the almond and of the plane-tree; and peeled white streaks in them, making the white appear which was in the rods. 38And he set the rods which he had peeled over against the flocks in the gutters in the watering-troughs where the flocks came to drink; and they conceived when they came to drink. 39And the flocks conceived at the sight of the rods, and the flocks brought

חוּם בַּכְּשָׂבִים וַיִּתֵּן בְּיַד־בָּנָיו׃ 36 וַיָּשֶׂם
דֶּרֶךְ שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים בֵּינוֹ וּבֵין יַעֲקֹב וְיַעֲקֹב
רֹעֶה אֶת־צֹאן לָבָן הַנּוֹתָרֹת׃
37 וַיִּקַּח־לוֹ יַעֲקֹב מַקַּל לִבְנֶה לַח וְלוּז
וְעֶרְמוֹן וַיְפַצֵּל בָּהֶן פְּצָלוֹת לְבָנוֹת מַחְשֹׂף
הַלְּבָן אֲשֶׁר עַל־הַמַּקְלוֹת׃ 38 וַיַּצֵּג אֶת־
הַמַּקְלוֹת אֲשֶׁר פִּצֵּל בָּרָהָטִים בְּשִׁקְתוֹת
הַמַּיִם אֲשֶׁר תָּבֹאן הַצֹּאן לִשְׁתּוֹת לְנֹכַח
הַצֹּאן וַיֵּחַמְנָה בְּבֹאָן לִשְׁתּוֹת׃ 39 וַיֶּחֱמְוּ
הַצֹּאן אֶל־הַמַּקְלוֹת וַתֵּלַדְן הַצֹּאן עֲקֻדִּים

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Isn't the episode of the shoots of poplar (vv. 37–39) a kind of cheating? One should not treat even a stranger this way, let alone one's own uncle and father-in-law!

RASHI **36 The rest.** The bad, "left-over" ones—the sick ones and the barren ones.

37 Fresh shoots of poplar. "Poplar" in Hebrew comes from the word for "white." "Fresh" is expressed by saying that they are still "moist." **Almond and plane.** Rather, "hazel and chestnut." **And peeled white stripes in them.** Wherever he peeled off some bark, the white of the wood underneath was revealed.

38 He set up. More precisely, as Onkelos translates, he "stuck" them in the ground. **In the troughs.** The water channels: pools made in the ground to water the flock. **Their mating occurred when they came to drink.** The female would see the rods and back up in alarm, and the male would mount her from behind; she would then bear offspring that resembled the rods. R. Hoshaiah says: The water became seed within them, so there was no need for males. That would explain the combined masculine and feminine form of the Hebrew verb.

39 By the rods. Rather, "*at* [the sight of] the rods" (OJPS). **Streaked.** More precisely,

RASHBAM **36 Between himself and Jacob.** That is, between the two different flocks of his own sheep, the ones Jacob was pasturing and the streaked and speckled ones he had removed.

37 Shoots of poplar. A shoot or stick is normally *makel* (as in Num. 22:27); here it is *makal* because it is in the construct form, a shoot *of* poplar. This is a standard alternation. **Laying bare.** Compare "the LORD will bare His holy arm" (Isa. 52:10) and "with bared arm" (Ezek. 4:7).

38 Their mating occurred. The verb has a masculine prefix and a feminine suffix; see 1 Sam. 6:12 and Dan. 8:22 for similar forms. Ezek. 37:7 displays precisely the opposite pattern.

39 The goats mated. Here, the verb form is completely masculine.

KIMHI **37 Jacob then got fresh shoots of poplar.** He did not do this at all during the first year, but waited until the next year. Then he set up the shoots (and so forth) not in front of Laban's sheep but in front of his own, the ones that had been born speckled and spotted. He wanted to make sure their offspring were also spotted, since if they produced white offspring Laban would suspect him of stealing them. This is how my father (of blessed memory) explained it. For many people have wondered how a righteous man like our father Jacob could possibly play a trick on Laban to increase his own share.

38 The troughs. See Onkelos; the Hebrew word implies that these were trenches in the ground through which the water "ran."

39 The goats brought forth streaked, speckled, and spotted young. The imaginative faculty resides in the brain, which is also the source of semen; that is why they gave birth to young that resembled the rods.

IBN EZRA **37 Fresh shoots of poplar, and of almond and plane.** The translations correctly distinguish between the three kinds of tree and the adjective "fresh" (which comes in between them in the Hebrew). It was Saadia who identified the "almond" tree here, where our verse uses the same word as in Arabic, which differs from the standard Hebrew word; those two languages plus Aramaic are all from the same language family.

38 That he had peeled. Rather, "in which he had made small incisions." **The troughs.** The Hebrew word refers specifically to water troughs. **Their mating occurred.** Do not be surprised to see the partially masculine form of the verb here and the completely masculine form of it in v. 39. In the singular, Hebrew distinguishes quite clearly between masculine and feminine, but the distinction is not made as sharply in the plural.

39 Since the goats mated by the rods. Rather, "the flocks mated, and on account of the rods, the [females] brought forth" and

NAHMANIDES **37 Jacob then got fresh shoots of poplar.** Once they had agreed on his wages, he was entitled to do whatever he could to produce animals of those kinds. Jacob may even have made this condition explicit; Laban does not seem to have known about these procedures. The shepherds would not pay attention to shoots of poplar being in the water troughs on a single occasion during the year. For Jacob did this only in Nisan, with the earlier breeding, as v. 41 is to be interpreted, not with the later breeding, in Tishrei, described in v. 42. (Had he done so, not a hoof would have been left for Laban!) But some understand that the marked animals were born for Jacob during the first year strictly through God's blessing, and that vv. 41–42 describe him doing the procedure only with his own animals and not with Laban's.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **37 Jacob then got fresh shoots of poplar.** It would seem that Jacob must have done all these things with Laban's permission, since they could not be done in secret. All the shepherds came to the same watering troughs, and there is no way this could have gone on for six years without Laban knowing about it (Bekhor Shor). Jacob took all this wood and penned in the females so they could not mate with the males immediately, but only under the conditions he would arrange; these are the "penned in" animals of v. 41 (Hizkuni).

38 Their mating. A grammatically androgynous word (Bekhor Shor). For other such androgynous verbs, see 1 Sam. 6:12, Ezek. 37:7, and Dan. 8:22 (Hizkuni).

39 Since the goats mated by the rods, the goats brought forth streaked, speckled, and spotted young. The colors operate respectively on the various humors (e.g., black on the black humor, red on the red); see the medical books (Gersonides).

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NJPS brought forth streaked, speckled, and spotted young. [40]But Jacob dealt separately with the sheep; he made these animals face the streaked or wholly dark-colored animals in Laban's flock. And so he produced special flocks for himself, which he did not put with Laban's flocks. [41]Moreover, when the sturdier animals were mating, Jacob would place the rods in the troughs, in full view of the animals, so

OJPS forth streaked, speckled, and spotted. [40]And Jacob separated the lambs—he also set the faces of the flocks toward the streaked and all the dark in the flock of Laban—and put his own droves apart, and put them not unto Laban's flock. [41]And it came to pass, whensoever the stronger of the flock did conceive, that Jacob laid the rods before the eyes of the flock in the gutters, that they might conceive among

נְקֻדִּים וּטְלָאִים׃ [40] וְהַכְּשָׂבִים֙ הִפְרִ֣יד יַעֲקֹ֔ב וַיִּתֵּ֥ן פְּנֵ֖י הַצֹּ֑אן אֶל־עָקֹ֡ד וְכָל־ חוּם֩ בְּצֹ֨אן לָבָ֜ן וַיָּ֤שֶׁת־לוֹ֙ עֲדָרִ֣ים לְבַדּ֔וֹ וְלֹ֥א שָׁתָ֖ם עַל־צֹ֥אן לָבָֽן׃ [41] וְהָיָ֗ה בְּכָל־ יַחֵם֙ הַצֹּ֣אן הַמְקֻשָּׁרוֹת֒ וְשָׂ֤ם יַעֲקֹב֙ אֶת־ הַמַּקְלוֹת֙ לְעֵינֵ֣י הַצֹּ֔אן בָּרָהָטִ֖ים לְיַחֵמֵ֑נָּה

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why did "Jacob deal separately with the sheep" (v. 40)?

RASHI "banded" in the locations where they would be tied, around the ankles of their fore- and back legs.

40 But Jacob dealt separately with the sheep. The ones who were born banded or speckled he separated into herds of each kind. He took the banded herd and led them in front of the flock, so that the flock that was behind them was looking at them. That is what making them **face the streaked or wholly dark-colored animals** means. Laban's flock was facing the banded ones, which belonged to Jacob. The same is true for the dark-colored ones. **He produced special flocks for himself.** As I just explained.

41 The sturdier animals. Rather, the "early-bearing" ones, as Onkelos translates. But I have no other example in the Bible to prove this is the meaning. Menahem connects it with the word from the same root that means "conspiracy," here implying the animals who "conspired" to conceive first.

KIMHI **40 But Jacob dealt separately with the sheep.** Because the streaked ones among the sheep did not belong to him, but the dark-colored ones did. That is why he watered them separately and not facing the rods. He did not have any dark-colored rods. He would have had to paint some, and then what he was doing would have been obvious. There was no way to paint them out in the wilderness anyway. **And so he produced special flocks for himself, which he did not put with Laban's flocks.** He got other shepherds for them and did not pasture them along with Laban's sheep. For Laban was stingy. Even though he changed the conditions every year, he always found Jacob's share greater than his own, and was always arguing with Jacob about it.

41 When the sturdier animals were mating. Rather, the earlier animals; sheep mate twice a year. Jacob would place the rods only during the first, smaller mating, when Laban did not bother to check. During the second mating, the main one, Laban did come to check on things, and Jacob did not use the rods. For Laban would have quarreled with him about it and called him a cheater, even though (as I have said) Jacob only used them with his own animals. But my father explained this as happening only once, in a year when they had agreed that the earlier offspring would be Jacob's and the later offspring

NAHMANIDES **40 But Jacob dealt separately with the sheep.** What Rashi says about this procedure is not correct. If the marked animals were all his, why would he deal separately with the sheep? Since Laban had taken all the marked animals, there were no sheep to separate in any case. But if we are talking about the next generation, some of the goats were his as well as some of the sheep. Why are we not told about reddish sheep being born? And why would Jacob have the sheep face the "streaked" animals (see next comment) if these were not his wages? The correct understanding of this expression is that Jacob made separate herds of goats and of sheep. **He made these animals face the streaked or wholly dark-colored animals.** The point of creating separate herds is that the dark-colored ones were to be his wage only among the sheep. He had the goats face only the streaked ones (and *only* the goats, according to the traditional commentators). But according to our view he put the sheep facing both the streaked ones and the dark-colored ones. Do not ask why it says "these animals" rather than "the sheep"; that is just a way of writing. Why does 31:25 say that Jacob pitched his tent "in the mountain" and that Laban pitched his "in the mountain of Gilead" (see OJPS) when this is one and the same mountain? **In Laban's flock.** He did this throughout Laban's flock, among which the marked animals all belonged to him. Again, separating the sheep and goats was because his wages were different for the sheep. As larger animals, they required more effort to breed the kind he wanted than the smaller goats.

41 The sturdier animals. Rather, the "bound" ones. As I see it, these are the animals among whom the females are constantly followed by the males because of their sexual desire. The Hebrew word is related to "his own life is so *bound up* with his" (44:30). There is a comparable expression in rabbinic Hebrew. In our case, the young born of these would be called the "bound ones" after their sires. Many think, as the translations do, that the word refers to the "sturdier" or "stronger" (OJPS) ones. The point would be that the limbs of

RASHBAM **40 Jacob dealt separately with the sheep.** Rather, he had "separated" (OJPS) the streaked and speckled ones from Laban's flock, in both the first and the second year. **He made these animals face the streaked or wholly dark-colored animals in Laban's flock.** So that they would see them and conceive young like them. This and the shoots of poplar were the two different methods he employed so the ewes would produce streaked and speckled animals.

41 The sturdier animals. Rather, "the connected animals." That is, he did this when the majority of them were ready to conceive.

IBN EZRA so on. Many people find this surprising and think it miraculous. But the truth is that it is simply one of the miracles of reproduction; that is how nature made it. It is so even with human females, created as they were in the image of the angels. **Spotted.** Here the general term refers to the kind not mentioned, the "mottled" ones (see 31:10).

40 But Jacob dealt separately with the sheep. As NJPS makes clear, this is a separate action, something different than the method with the rods. He selected the streaked or dark animals and made the flock face them so the females would bear that kind of young. Remember that by now he had flocks of his own, **which he did not put with Laban's flocks.** In fact, some say that the first phrase means that "Jacob *had* dealt separately with the sheep," separating Laban's animals from his own.

41 The sturdier animals. Those that were born in Nisan, when all the young were strong and healthy.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **40 Which he did not put with Laban's flocks.** Those that were still mingled with his own. He did not want Laban complaining that Jacob was trying to make Laban's sheep bear the kind that Jacob was entitled to (Abarbanel).

41 The sturdier animals. Literally, the "penned in" ones; see my comment to v. 38 (Hizkuni).

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NJPS that they mated by the rods; [42]but with the feebler animals he would not place them there. Thus the feeble ones went to Laban and the sturdy to Jacob. [43]So the man grew exceedingly prosperous, and came to own large flocks, maidservants and menservants, camels and asses.

31 Now he heard the things that Laban's sons were saying: "Jacob has taken all that was our father's, and from that which was our father's he has built up all this wealth." [2]Jacob also saw that Laban's manner toward him was not as it had been in the past. [3]Then the LORD said to Jacob, "Return to the land of your fathers where you were born, and I will be with you." [4]Jacob had Rachel and Leah called to the

OJPS the rods; [42]but when the flock were feeble, he put them not in; so the feebler were Laban's, and the stronger Jacob's. [43]And the man increased exceedingly, and had large flocks, and maid-servants and men-servants, and camels and asses.

31 [1]And he heard the words of Laban's sons, saying: "Jacob hath taken away all that was our father's; and of that which was our father's hath he gotten all this wealth." [2]And Jacob beheld the countenance of Laban, and, behold, it was not toward him as beforetime. [3]And the LORD said unto Jacob: "Return unto the land of thy fathers, and to thy kindred; and I will be with thee." [4]And Jacob sent and called

בַּמַּקְלוֹת׃ 42 וּבְהַעֲטִיף* הַצֹּאן לֹא יָשִׂים
וְהָיָה הָעֲטֻפִים לְלָבָן וְהַקְשָׁרִים לְיַעֲקֹב׃
43 וַיִּפְרֹץ הָאִישׁ מְאֹד מְאֹד וַיְהִי־לוֹ צֹאן
רַבּוֹת וּשְׁפָחוֹת וַעֲבָדִים וּגְמַלִּים וַחֲמֹרִים׃

לא וַיִּשְׁמַע אֶת־דִּבְרֵי בְנֵי־לָבָן
לֵאמֹר לָקַח יַעֲקֹב אֵת כָּל־אֲשֶׁר לְאָבִינוּ
וּמֵאֲשֶׁר לְאָבִינוּ עָשָׂה אֵת כָּל־הַכָּבֹד
הַזֶּה׃ 2 וַיַּרְא יַעֲקֹב אֶת־פְּנֵי לָבָן וְהִנֵּה
אֵינֶנּוּ עִמּוֹ כִּתְמוֹל שִׁלְשׁוֹם׃ 3 וַיֹּאמֶר
יְהוָה אֶל־יַעֲקֹב שׁוּב אֶל־אֶרֶץ אֲבוֹתֶיךָ
וּלְמוֹלַדְתֶּךָ וְאֶהְיֶה עִמָּךְ׃ 4 וַיִּשְׁלַח יַעֲקֹב

* ח׳ רבתי לפי מהדורת לעטעריס *v. 42.*

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why did Jacob have Rachel and Leah "called to the field" (v. 4) instead of speaking to them at home?

RASHI **42 The feebler animals.** Rather, the "tardier" ones; again, see Onkelos. Menahem takes it as "the mantled ones" (see Isa. 3:22 for the article of clothing), that is, those who mantled themselves in their hides and wool and were in no hurry to be "in heat" with the males.

43 Large flocks. Rather, "multiplying" flocks, flocks that were fertile and increased more than the others. **Maidservants and menservants, camels and asses.** He sold his sheep at a high price and bought all these.

31:1 Built up. Literally "made," in the sense of "acquired" (compare OJPS): "he *gathered* an army and defeated the Amalekites" (1 Sam. 14:48).

3 Return to the land of your fathers. And there I will be with you. But as long as you are connected with this unclean person it is impossible for My Shekhinah to rest upon you.

4 Jacob had Rachel and Leah called. Rachel first; afterward Leah. For Rachel was the chief wife. She was the whole reason he had gotten entangled with Laban. Even Leah's sons were aware of this. Notice what Boaz and his council, all descended from Leah's son

RASHBAM **42 The feebler animals.** Rather, "the loosely connected animals." Once the first ones had conceived, he did not bother with the later ones.

31:1 All this wealth. Literally, "this heaviness." The same metaphor is used in "Abram was very rich in cattle, silver, and gold" (13:2), literally "very heavy."

IBN EZRA **42 The feebler animals.** Born in Tishrei. Jacob did this so Laban would not figure out the trick with the rods. **The feeble ones.** For another word from the same root, see "hungry and thirsty, their spirit *failed*" (Ps. 107:5).

31:1 The things that Laban's sons were saying. For Laban had sons as well as daughters; see 30:35.

KIMHI Laban's. **They mated.** For the morphology of this unusual form, see the grammar section of my *Mikhlol*. The whole point of this episode is God's providential care of the righteous, protecting them when "the wicked watches for the righteous, seeking to put him to death; the LORD will not abandon him to his power" (Ps. 37:32–33).

43 So the man grew exceedingly prosperous. The Hebrew verb literally means "to breach, break through"; the metaphor is of wealth growing so great that it bursts the bounds of the place that contains it. This is hyperbole. **Large flocks.** "Large" is feminine, since the increase comes from them; there can be one male to a number of females. Cattle are not mentioned here (though he had some) because the flocks were his occupation.

31:1 The things that Laban's sons were saying. To each other, and to their father, in front of Jacob's sons.

2 Jacob also saw that Laban's manner toward him was not as it had been in the past. God's word came to him a dream while he was still thinking about what he had seen and heard.

3 The LORD said to Jacob. The messenger is called by the name of his Master and speaks the message in his Master's voice, as if the One who sent the message were himself speaking.

NAHMANIDES these animals are more strongly "bound" to each other, accounting for their better health. The opposite applies to "the feebler animals" of v. 42; for that word, compare "your infants, who *faint* for hunger" (Lam. 2:19); they would have little or no desire. But the Targum calls them the earlier and later animals after the seasons when the two kinds of animals are produced.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **31:1 All this wealth.** Jacob had sold some of his flock (so it would not look to Laban as if he had too many) and bought slaves, camels, and asses (Abarbanel).

2 Jacob also saw that Laban's manner toward him was not as it had been in the past. Between this and the things Laban's sons were saying, Jacob was eager to go home. But the journey was dangerous, and he was afraid of his brother Esau's anger (Gersonides). He saw that Laban believed the things his sons were saying (Sforno).

3 Return to the land of your fathers where you were born, and I will be with you. This is the dream Jacob recounts later to Rachel and Leah, though only these few words of it are mentioned here (Bekhor Shor). This undoubtedly occurred after Jacob had served the six years he owed and after Laban had taken back all his own flocks, so that Jacob now was pasturing only animals that belonged to him (Abarbanel).

4 Jacob had Rachel and Leah called to the field. But Bilhah, Zilpah, and his sons did not need to be called; they were usually in the

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NJPS field, where his flock was, [5]and said to them, "I see that your father's manner toward me is not as it has been in the past. But the God of my father has been with me. [6]As you know, I have served your father with all my might; [7]but your father has cheated me, changing my wages time and again. God, however, would not let him do me harm. [8]If he said thus, 'The speckled shall be your wages,' then all the flocks would drop speckled young; and if he said thus, 'The streaked shall be your wages,' then all the flocks

OJPS Rachel and Leah to the field unto his flock, [5]and said unto them: "I see your father's countenance, that it is not toward me as beforetime; but the God of my father hath been with me. [6]And ye know that with all my power I have served your father. [7]And your father hath mocked me, and changed my wages ten times; but God suffered him not to hurt me. [8]If he said thus: The speckled shall be thy wages; then all the flock bore speckled; and if he said thus: The streaked shall be thy wages; then bore all the flock

וַיִּקְרָא לְרָחֵל וּלְלֵאָה הַשָּׂדֶה אֶל־צֹאנוֹ׃
5 וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶן רֹאֶה אָנֹכִי אֶת־פְּנֵי אֲבִיכֶן
כִּי־אֵינֶנּוּ אֵלַי כִּתְמֹל שִׁלְשֹׁם וֵאלֹהֵי אָבִי
הָיָה עִמָּדִי׃ 6 וְאַתֶּנָּה יְדַעְתֶּן כִּי בְּכָל־כֹּחִי
עָבַדְתִּי אֶת־אֲבִיכֶן׃ 7 וַאֲבִיכֶן הֵתֶל בִּי
וְהֶחֱלֵף אֶת־מַשְׂכֻּרְתִּי עֲשֶׂרֶת מֹנִים וְלֹא־
נְתָנוֹ אֱלֹהִים לְהָרַע עִמָּדִי׃ 8 אִם־כֹּה
יֹאמַר נְקֻדִּים יִהְיֶה שְׂכָרֶךָ וְיָלְדוּ כָל־הַצֹּאן
נְקֻדִּים וְאִם־כֹּה יֹאמַר עֲקֻדִּים יִהְיֶה שְׂכָרֶךָ

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why did he not tell them the things he heard "that Laban's sons were saying" (as we read in v. 1), but only what he saw about "your father's manner toward me" (v. 5)? It was both those things that prompted his decision. ✦ Why does Jacob tell them that their father has changed his wages "ten times" (v. 7; see OJPS), as indeed he repeats to Laban himself in v. 41? That does not appear to be true. Remember that in 30:34 Laban actually told him, "Very well, let it be as you say."

RASHI Judah, would later say: "May the LORD make the woman who is coming into your house like Rachel and Leah, both of whom built up the House of Israel!" (Ruth 4:11). They too put Rachel ahead of Leah.

7 Time and again. Literally, "10 counts"; you will not find this word "counts" used with a number less than 10. **[H]** Changing Jacob's wages "10 counts" therefore means that he changed them 100 times.

[H] The word is related to the *minyan* counted for prayer, which must be at least 10.

KIMHI **5 But the God of my father has been with me.** The wealth your father is so jealous of is not his; it came to me because God helped me succeed.

7 Cheated. The verb is in Qal here even though it is in Piel in 1 Kings 18:27. **[B] Time and again.** Our Sages say that he literally did change Jacob's wages "ten times" (OJPS). Remember that Jacob served him for wages for six years and that the sheep produced young twice a year. Laban changed the conditions when he saw what happened during the first year and did so again twice during each of the next four years and now again during the sixth year, for a total of 10 times.

8 All the flocks would drop speckled young. "All" meaning the vast majority, as in "all the world came to Joseph in Egypt to procure rations" (41:47).

[B] See Special Topics, "Biblical Hebrew."

RASHBAM **5 But the God of my father has been with me.** Despite your father's ingratitude toward me, I stole nothing from him; the Holy One was with me, and He gave me all this.

7 Time and again. Literally, "ten counts," but "ten" (OJPS) is not in fact meant literally. Compare "*ten* women shall bake your bread in a single oven" (Lev. 26:26); "*time and again* you humiliate me" (Job 19:3). It means "a lot of times."

8 Then all the flocks would drop speckled young. Not on account of the poplar shoots.

IBN EZRA **5 Your father's manner.** Literally, his "countenance" (OJPS). I can see in his face that he is not the same to me as he once was. Or, though "countenance" is plural in Hebrew and "is not" is singular, it may nonetheless mean that "his countenance is not the same to me." Note that in "the LORD's countenance has turned away from them" (Lam. 4:16), "countenance" is also treated as if it were a singular word.

7 Cheated. The fact that the ת in this word has no *dagesh* is extremely strange; compare the same word in "Elijah *mocked* them" (1 Kings 18:27). **Time and again.** Literally "10 counts"; see "Go and *number* Israel and Judah" (2 Sam. 24:1)—that is, "ten times" (OJPS). But he may be simply using it as a round number.

8 The speckled shall be your wages. That is, his wages were changed to be the speckled ones only. **The streaked shall be your wages.** Another of the changes.

NAHMANIDES **31:6 I have served your father with all my might.** From the very first. And he was blessed on my account (see 30:30). — Laban may well have had many sheep of his own, even the feebler, later-breeding animals being blessed on Jacob's account. Laban's sons were only complaining because Jacob was getting so wealthy.

7 Your father has cheated me, changing my wages. This is certainly true, even though the text has not mentioned it until now; Jacob says it to Laban's face in v. 41. You will find instances of this sort—things the Torah mentions without previously telling us about them—in many places in the Torah. For example, in between 30:15 and 16, Leah must have given the mandrakes to Rachel.

8 If he said thus, "The speckled shall be your wages." Remember that he originally agreed on the "speckled and spotted" animals (30:32), as well as the reddish sheep. Then he would renege and propose a different pattern, changing them every year. But the flock would always produce that kind of young. It had nothing to do with the rods, for Jacob is telling them that "God . . . would not let him do me harm" (v. 7). It may even be that Laban would change the stipulation *after* the females got pregnant and they would nonetheless bear the kind Jacob wanted, as their Maker thought right to do. According to Genesis Rabbah, the Holy One anticipated what Laban would do and arranged things accordingly. For, despite the translations, the text here does not say "if he said" but "if he *would* say."

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS field working with him (Hizkuni). Jacob did not want to tell them this in town, where Laban's sons (who were always hanging around their sisters) might hear (Abarbanel).

7 Your father has cheated me. Even though he originally told me [in 30:34], "Very well, let it be as you say" (Bekhor Shor). **Changing my wages time and again.** Literally, "10 times"—but the word can also be interpreted, based on the usage in "I will make *your oppressors* eat their own flesh" (Isa. 49:26), as "10 occurrences of cheating." (Bekhor Shor). "Ten" here means "a lot"; my analysis suggests that it happened six times (Gersonides). **God, however, would not let him do me harm.** But he certainly tried to (Bekhor Shor).

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NJPS would drop streaked young. [9]God has taken away your father's livestock and given it to me.

[10]"Once, at the mating time of the flocks, I had a dream in which I saw that the he-goats mating with the flock were streaked, speckled, and mottled. [11]And in the dream an angel of God said to me, 'Jacob!' 'Here,' I answered. [12]And he said, 'Note well that all the he-goats which are mating with the flock are streaked, speckled, and mottled; for I have noted all that Laban has been doing to you. [13]I am the God of Beth-el, where you anointed a pillar and where you made a vow to Me. Now, arise and leave this land and return to your native land.'"

OJPS streaked. [9]Thus God hath taken away the cattle of your father, and given them to me.

[10]And it came to pass at the time that the flock conceived, that I lifted up mine eyes, and saw in a dream, and, behold, the he-goats which leaped upon the flock were streaked, speckled, and grizzled. [11]And the angel of God said unto me in the dream: Jacob; and I said: Here am I. [12]And he said: Lift up now thine eyes, and see, all the he-goats which leap upon the flock are streaked, speckled, and grizzled; for I have seen all that Laban doeth unto thee. [13]I am the God of Beth-el, where thou didst anoint a pillar, where thou didst vow a vow unto Me. Now arise, get thee out from this land, and return unto the land of thy nativity."

וְיָלְדוּ כָל־הַצֹּאן עֲקֻדִּים׃ 9 וַיַּצֵּל אֱלֹהִים
אֶת־מִקְנֵה אֲבִיכֶם וַיִּתֶּן־לִי׃
10 וַיְהִי בְּעֵת יַחֵם הַצֹּאן וָאֶשָּׂא עֵינַי וָאֵרֶא
בַּחֲלוֹם וְהִנֵּה הָעַתֻּדִים הָעֹלִים עַל־הַצֹּאן
עֲקֻדִּים נְקֻדִּים וּבְרֻדִּים׃ 11 וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלַי
מַלְאַךְ הָאֱלֹהִים בַּחֲלוֹם יַעֲקֹב וָאֹמַר
הִנֵּנִי׃ 12 וַיֹּאמֶר שָׂא־נָא עֵינֶיךָ וּרְאֵה כָּל־
הָעַתֻּדִים הָעֹלִים עַל־הַצֹּאן עֲקֻדִּים
נְקֻדִּים וּבְרֻדִּים כִּי רָאִיתִי אֵת כָּל־אֲשֶׁר
לָבָן עֹשֶׂה לָךְ׃ 13 אָנֹכִי הָאֵל בֵּית־אֵל אֲשֶׁר
מָשַׁחְתָּ שָּׁם מַצֵּבָה אֲשֶׁר נָדַרְתָּ לִי שָׁם
נֶדֶר עַתָּה קוּם צֵא מִן־הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת וְשׁוּב
אֶל־אֶרֶץ מוֹלַדְתֶּךָ׃

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Notice that in the dream of vv. 10–12 Jacob says nothing about what he himself did, peeling the shoots. Is Jacob telling them what he really dreamt, or is he changing it?

RASHI **10 Streaked, speckled, and mottled.** Even though Laban had separated them all so the sheep would not conceive those kinds. The angels would bring them from the herd that Laban's sons were in charge of to the herd Jacob was in charge of. For "mottled," compare Onkelos; they had a white stripe encircling their bodies, each separate "spot" open and spreading into the next. But I cannot find another example of the word in the Bible to demonstrate this.

13 The God of Beth-el. The ה at the beginning of the Hebrew phrase is extraneous. For other examples of an apparent definite article at the beginning of a construct phrase, see the Hebrew of "the land of Canaan" (Num. 34:2, first example). **Where you anointed a pillar.** That is, where you "dedicated" a pillar by pouring oil on it (see 28:18). **Where you made a vow to Me.** Which you must fulfill. You said that the pillar would

KIMHI **9 God has taken away your father's livestock and given it to me.** He showed me in the dream that He had done it and that it was not merely happenstance. — God exercises providential care over those who fear Him, protecting them from those who would harm them and ensuring that they do well.

13 Where you made a vow to Me. As I noted in my comment to v. 5, the angel speaks in the voice of his Master. Jacob obviously did not make a vow to this angel, but to God.

RASHBAM **9 God has taken away your father's livestock.** All such verbs—save, deliver, remove—all referring to taking something away.

13 Where you anointed a pillar. You anointed it to consecrate it, but you have not yet made the offerings you vowed to bring.

IBN EZRA **9 Taken away.** As in "they *stripped* the Egyptians" (Exod. 12:36), both of these examples being related to the verb in "*deliver* me, I pray" (32:12), though that meaning is somewhat farther removed.

10 I had a dream. He really did have this dream. The Holy One was helping him to breed strong sheep for himself even without the use of the rods.

13 I am the God of Beth-el. The Hebrew idiom is, "I am the God [who is the God of] Beth-el"; see my comment to "the tree of knowledge of good and bad" (2:9).

NAHMANIDES **10 Once, at the mating time of the flocks.** At a time when Laban had changed his wages: "For I have noted all that Laban has been doing to you" (v. 12). **The he-goats.** Rather, "the males." Both rams and he-goats can be called by the Hebrew term used here, as even great human males can be: "all earth's *chieftains*" (Isa. 14:9). **Were streaked, speckled, and mottled.** At first they were all streaked, then they were all speckled, and finally they were all mottled. He was telling Jacob that He saw the violence Laban was doing him by changing his wages and that He would make sure whatever kind Jacob needed would be born. From this time forth Jacob did not bother with the rods; "he who trusts in the LORD shall be safeguarded" (Prov. 29:25). Rashi thinks angels were actually moving the flocks around, but the straightforward sense of the text is that this was a vision to reassure him that the variety he wanted would be born. The proof is the word "behold" (OJPS; not translated in NJPS), which is always used in recounting a dream as if it were real. Even Genesis Rabbah merely implies that the angels were moving animals around. But the straightforward sense is as we have explained.

13 I am the God of Beth-el. See Rashi's explanation of the unusual Hebrew; the language experts relate it to "the tree of knowledge of good and bad" (2:9) or "the two golden cords" of Exod. 39:17. It is important to remember that this is an angel, saying "I am the God of Beth-el" in the voice of the One who sent him. But according to the way of Truth, the angel is saying, "*Anokhi* ["I"] is the God of Beth-el." In 35:7, Jacob will build an altar and name the site El-bethel ("the God of Beth-el"). Compare Jerusalem being called "Zion of the Holy One of Israel" (Isa. 60:14). The implication of Jonathan b. Uzziel's Aramaic translation of Isa. 6:3 **[I]** is that this angel is "the Angel who has redeemed me from all harm" (48:16); see also "he is trusted throughout My household" (Num. 12:7). One who is enlightened will understand. **Where you anointed a pillar and where you made a vow to Me.** You vowed to serve the Holy One in the chosen land, to make that stone a house of God for you, and to present your tithes there. If you delay fulfilling that vow any longer, "God may be angered by your talk" (Eccles. 5:5). **Now, arise and leave this land and return to your native land.** Jacob is still telling his wives what the

[I] Jonathan b. Uzziel expands "Holy, holy, holy!" of that verse into three longer phrases. Nahmanides is hinting at something; the explanation given here is a guess at it.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **10 Once, at the mating time of the flocks, I had a dream.** This is not the same prophecy that is recounted in v. 3 (Gersonides).

11 An angel of God. The Hebrew expression occurs only seven other times (Masorah).

13 I am the God of Beth-el. Jacob now begins to tell them the later prophecy of v. 3 (Gersonides).

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NJPS [14]Then Rachel and Leah answered him, saying, "Have we still a share in the inheritance of our father's house? [15]Surely, he regards us as outsiders, now that he has sold us and has used up our purchase price. [16]Truly, all the wealth that God has taken away from our father belongs to us and to our children. Now then, do just as God has told you."

[17]Thereupon Jacob put his children and wives on camels; [18]and he drove off all his livestock and all the wealth that he had amassed, the livestock in his possession that he had acquired in Paddan-aram, to go to his father Isaac in the land of Canaan.

[19]Meanwhile Laban had gone to shear his sheep, and Rachel stole her father's

OJPS [14]And Rachel and Leah answered and said unto him: "Is there yet any portion or inheritance for us in our father's house? [15]Are we not accounted by him strangers? for he hath sold us, and hath also quite devoured our price. [16]For all the riches which God hath taken away from our father, that is ours and our children's. Now then, whatsoever God hath said unto thee, do."

[17]Then Jacob rose up, and set his sons and his wives upon the camels; [18]and he carried away all his cattle, and all his substance which he had gathered, the cattle of his getting, which he had gathered in Paddan-aram, to go to Isaac his father unto the land of Canaan.

[19]Now Laban was gone to shear his sheep. And Rachel stole the teraphim that

14 וַתַּעַן רָחֵל וְלֵאָה וַתֹּאמַרְנָה לוֹ הַעוֹד
לָנוּ חֵלֶק וְנַחֲלָה בְּבֵית אָבִינוּ׃ 15 הֲלוֹא
נָכְרִיּוֹת נֶחְשַׁבְנוּ לוֹ כִּי מְכָרָנוּ וַיֹּאכַל
גַּם־אָכוֹל אֶת־כַּסְפֵּנוּ׃ 16 כִּי כָל־הָעֹשֶׁר
אֲשֶׁר הִצִּיל אֱלֹהִים מֵאָבִינוּ לָנוּ הִוא
וּלְבָנֵינוּ וְעַתָּה כֹּל אֲשֶׁר אָמַר אֱלֹהִים
אֵלֶיךָ עֲשֵׂה׃ ששי
17 וַיָּקָם יַעֲקֹב וַיִּשָּׂא אֶת־בָּנָיו וְאֶת־נָשָׁיו
עַל־הַגְּמַלִּים׃ 18 וַיִּנְהַג אֶת־כָּל־מִקְנֵהוּ
וְאֶת־כָּל־רְכֻשׁוֹ אֲשֶׁר רָכָשׁ מִקְנֵה קִנְיָנוֹ
אֲשֶׁר רָכַשׁ בְּפַדַּן אֲרָם לָבוֹא אֶל־יִצְחָק
אָבִיו אַרְצָה כְּנָעַן׃
19 וְלָבָן הָלַךְ לִגְזֹז אֶת־צֹאנוֹ וַתִּגְנֹב רָחֵל

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ In what way is Rachel and Leah's complaint about Laban, "Have we still a share in the inheritance of our father's house?" (v. 14), a response to what Jacob has said about a totally different subject? ✦ What made Rachel steal the idols (v. 19)?

RASHI "be God's abode" (28:22), implying you would present offerings there.

14 Have we still a share? Why would we stop you from leaving? Do we have any expectations of inheriting any of our father's property with all these males around?

15 Surely, he regards us as outsiders. Even when it is the custom for men to give something to their daughters—as a dowry when they marry—he treated us like outsiders. We were sold to you for your labor! **Our purchase price.** "Purchase" is not in the Hebrew, which simply says "our money": "He has withheld your wages."

16 Truly. The word *ki* here really means "rather, except." They are saying, "We have nothing of our father's *except* **all the wealth that God has taken away from our father**, which is now ours. "Taken away" is the same verb that elsewhere is used to mean "rescue." But that just means it has been "taken away" from an enemy or something else that is evil.

17 His children and wives. More precisely, "his sons and his wives" (OJPS). He put the males first. But Esau put the females first: "Esau took his wives, his sons . . ." (36:6).

18 The livestock in his possession. The Hebrew is more general: "all his substance which he had gathered" (OJPS): what he had bought from the proceeds of selling his flock—"maidservants and menservants, camels and asses" (30:43).

19 To shear his sheep. Which he had handed over to his sons, three days' journey away from Jacob. **Rachel stole her father's household idols.** Her intent was to disengage her father from idol worship.

RASHBAM **15 Our purchase price.** The money by which he enriched himself when we got married—money that should have gone to you, for your hard work, to support us.

19 Rachel stole her father's household idols. So they would not reveal to Laban that Jacob intended to flee. As we see from

IBN EZRA **15 He has sold us.** It is as if he has sold us, having told you, "Tend my sheep and take my daughters as your wages." That is not how a father should treat his daughters!

18 All the wealth that he had amassed. "Wealth" and "amassed" are from the same root in Hebrew.

19 Meanwhile Laban had gone to shear his sheep. Which he had left "in the charge of his sons . . . a distance of three days" away (30:35–36). That is why Laban was not told that Jacob had fled until "the third day" (v. 22). **Household idols.** Some say that these "teraphim" were actually a

KIMHI **14 Rachel and Leah answered him.** Rachel was the first to answer, loving Jacob as much as he loved her.

18 All his livestock. The ones he had pastured. **All the wealth that he had amassed, the livestock in his possession.** The ones he had bought.

19 Rachel stole her father's household idols. Laban and his sons were out with the sheep, so there was no one in the house to stop her. The teraphim, however, were not idols, but a bronze instrument that not only told the time but also predicted the future (though it

NAHMANIDES angel told him in a dream, all to persuade them to leave with him. But what he is telling is not a single dream. The dream about "the he-goats which are mating" (v. 12) took place when that was happening in some prior year. The dream described in our verse took place just before their journey. Once he was told this, Jacob would not stay in Haran herding Laban's flocks any longer, waiting for them to produce mottled young. On the morning after he had this latter dream, he sent for Rachel and Leah, told them his dream, and they left.

19 Rachel stole her father's household idols. Rashi says she wanted to disengage her father from idol worship. And perhaps Laban did keep these to worship: "Why did you steal my gods?" (31:30). But not all teraphim were used for worship; how could there be idolatry in the house of our lord David? **[J]** The idea that these were instruments that told the time and predicted the future is the most plausible

[J] See Ibn Ezra's comment.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **16 Truly.** As in 18:15, the Hebrew word really means "on the contrary" (Sforno).

18 He drove off all his livestock and all the wealth that he had amassed. The opposite of one who is fleeing, who leaves things here and there by the side of the road as he flees (Abarbanel).

19 Laban had gone to shear his sheep. Jacob was traveling in leisurely fashion, not fleeing; but he did wait to leave until Laban had gone. He wanted a head start (Abarbanel). **Rachel stole her father's household idols.** She wanted them because she knew that they

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NJPS household idols. [20]Jacob kept Laban the Aramean in the dark, not telling him that he was fleeing, [21]and fled with all that he had. Soon he was across the Euphrates and heading toward the hill country of Gilead.

[22]On the third day, Laban was told that Jacob had fled. [23]So he took his kinsmen with him and pursued him a distance of seven days, catching up with him in the

OJPS were her father's. [20]And Jacob outwitted Laban the Aramean, in that he told him not that he fled. [21]So he fled with all that he had; and he rose up, and passed over the River, and set his face toward the mountain of Gilead.

[22]And it was told Laban on the third day that Jacob was fled. [23]And he took his brethren with him, and pursued after him seven days' journey; and he overtook him

אֶת־הַתְּרָפִים אֲשֶׁר לְאָבִיהָ׃ 20 וַיִּגְנֹב יַעֲקֹב אֶת־לֵב לָבָן הָאֲרַמִּי עַל־בְּלִי הִגִּיד לוֹ כִּי בֹרֵחַ הוּא׃ 21 וַיִּבְרַח הוּא וְכָל־ אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ וַיָּקָם וַיַּעֲבֹר אֶת־הַנָּהָר וַיָּשֶׂם אֶת־פָּנָיו הַר הַגִּלְעָד׃ 22 וַיֻּגַּד לְלָבָן בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי כִּי בָרַח יַעֲקֹב׃ 23 וַיִּקַּח אֶת־אֶחָיו עִמּוֹ וַיִּרְדֹּף אַחֲרָיו דֶּרֶךְ שִׁבְעַת יָמִים וַיַּדְבֵּק אֹתוֹ בְּהַר

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ What is so bad about the fact that Jacob "kept Laban the Aramean in the dark" (v. 20)? Did Laban tell Jacob everything *he* was doing? Was Jacob supposed to tell him, "I'm fleeing"?!

RASHI **22 On the third day.** Remember that they were three days' journey apart.

23 His kinsmen. Again, OJPS translates literally but NJPS has the correct sense. **A distance of seven days.** For the whole three days it took to inform Laban that Jacob had fled, Jacob stayed on the move, leaving him six days ahead of Laban, who caught him on the seventh day. We therefore learn that Laban traveled as far in one day as Jacob traveled in seven. Note that it

RASHBAM "the Israelites shall go a long time without . . . ephod and teraphim" (Hosea 3:4) and "the teraphim spoke delusion" (Zech. 10:2), they were accustomed to do magic with these "teraphim."

23 A distance of seven days. Jacob was traveling slowly because of the sheep. Laban, who was already far from him, "had gone to shear his sheep" (v. 19); remember that he had originally "put a distance of three days' journey between himself and

KIMHI was often wrong). The Hebrew word for it is plural, since it had multiple panels. (See further Ibn Ezra's comments.) Jacob, of course, knew nothing about it. Had he known, he would not have let her take anything from her father's house, let alone the teraphim.

20 Jacob kept Laban the Aramean in the dark, not telling him that he was fleeing. Obviously he would not have told him he was fleeing. The point is that he did not tell him of his intent to leave.

21 The Euphrates. The Hebrew says merely "the river" (compare OJPS).

IBN EZRA bronze instrument for measuring time; others think that experienced astrologers can actually make images that speak at certain hours. Their proof is "the teraphim spoke delusion" (Zech. 10:2). But that is not what that verse actually means. It seems most plausible to me that these teraphim were images made to resemble human beings. Such an image is constructed to be a channel for the power of the upper worlds; I really must not explain more than this. The proof that teraphim look like human beings comes from 1 Sam. 19:13, where "Michal took the teraphim, laid it on the bed, and covered it with a cloth; and at its head she put a net of goat's hair," so the guards would think it was David. As for Hosea 3:4, that verse can be interpreted in two different ways, but both understandings retain the meaning of "teraphim" as something idolatrous. In any case, Laban explicitly calls these teraphim his "gods" (v. 30). Some think Rachel took them to get her father away from idolatry, but if that were so, why did she take them with her and not just bury them somewhere on the way? The most plausible solution is that Laban was an astrologer and she was afraid he would use the teraphim to look at the stars and figure out which way they had fled.

20 Jacob kept Laban the Aramean in the dark. As the Hebrew idiom puts it, "Jacob stole Laban's heart"—but *not* his idols or his sheep.

NAHMANIDES explanation of them. The word teraphim is related to the Hebrew of "shirkers" (Exod. 5:17) and "disheartened" (2 Sam. 17:20); what they said was a weak kind of prophecy. Most of the time it would come true, but now and again it would not: "For the teraphim spoke delusion" (Zech. 10:2). Those of little faith might certainly turn them into gods, not making requests in the name of the Holy One or praying to him but just acting in accordance with the magical things these teraphim tell them. We know from Judg. 17:5 that Micah had teraphim, and when the Levite he hired was asked in Judg. 18:5 to "inquire of God" he presumably asked the teraphim. The Israelites did the same with the ephod. **[K]** Once they became accustomed to it, they made copies of it, inquired of the copies, believed what they were told, and went astray after them. Even when ill they would not turn to the Lord but to them. For another example, see Judg. 8:27. Now Laban was most certainly a magician and a diviner, as he told Jacob in 30:27, and his land had long been known as a land of magicians; see Isa. 2:6, where the Israelites are accused of being "full [of practices] from the East, and of soothsaying like the Philistines." Balaam son of Beor the magician was from this very town. This is the meaning of Laban's saying, "Why did you steal my gods?" (31:30).

20 Laban the Aramean. See my comment to this phrase in v. 24.

23 A distance of seven days. Rashi's view is taken from Genesis Rabbah. It is certainly true that Laban was racing "like a hero, eager to run his course" (Ps. 19:6); that is what people do when they are in hot pursuit. But Laban "put a distance of three days' journey between himself and Jacob" (30:36)—*not* between himself and the town. Even if Laban kept his flock east of town and Jacob kept his on the west, they were three days' journey apart. But Jacob departed from the town, where his house and his sons and daughters were, along with everything else he had apart from the flocks. Laban was not

[K] See Exodus 28.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS could speak by magic (Bekhor Shor). The Michal incident in 1 Samuel 19 makes clear that these were human-sized and -shaped. The magician's imaginative faculty could picture them speaking at certain times. It is impossible that they literally spoke, since this cannot happen without the organs of speech that the Holy One provided in nature (Gersonides).

20 Jacob kept Laban the Aramean in the dark. Literally, he "stole Laban's heart" just as Rachel had stolen the idols (Bekhor Shor). **Not telling him that he was fleeing.** One possible explanation of this verse is that Jacob had kept Laban in the dark *when he arrived*, not telling him that he was fleeing from Esau, but merely that they had quarreled. Laban would therefore have no reason to think that Jacob was fleeing now (Abarbanel).

22 On the third day, Laban was told that Jacob had fled. And it was four days from his home to Mount Gilead (Bekhor Shor).

23 A distance of seven days. So it took Jacob 10 days to travel the same distance that Laban traveled in 4. Jacob, of course, had to go slowly because of the livestock and the children (Bekhor Shor). Rather, it took Laban 7 days to travel the distance that Jacob needed

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NJPS hill country of Gilead. 24But God appeared to Laban the Aramean in a dream by night and said to him, "Beware of attempting anything with Jacob, good or bad."

25Laban overtook Jacob. Jacob had pitched his tent on the Height, and Laban with his kinsmen encamped in the hill country of Gilead. 26And Laban said to Jacob, "What did you mean by keeping me in the dark and carrying off my daughters like captives of the sword? 27Why did you flee in secrecy and mislead me and not tell me? I would have sent you off with festive music, with timbrel and lyre. 28You did not even let me kiss my sons and daughters good-by! It was a foolish thing

OJPS in the mountain of Gilead. 24And God came to Laban the Aramean in a dream of the night, and said unto him: "Take heed to thyself that thou speak not to Jacob either good or bad."

25And Laban came up with Jacob. Now Jacob had pitched his tent in the mountain; and Laban with his brethren pitched in the mountain of Gilead. 26And Laban said to Jacob: "What hast thou done, that thou hast outwitted me, and carried away my daughters as though captives of the sword? 27Wherefore didst thou flee secretly, and outwit me; and didst not tell me, that I might have sent thee away with mirth and with songs, with tabret and with harp; 28and didst not suffer me to kiss my sons and my daughters? now hast thou

הַגִּלְעָד׃ 24 וַיָּבֹא אֱלֹהִים אֶל־לָבָן הָאֲרַמִּי בַּחֲלֹם הַלָּיְלָה וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ הִשָּׁמֶר לְךָ פֶּן־תְּדַבֵּר עִם־יַעֲקֹב מִטּוֹב עַד־רָע׃ 25 וַיַּשֵּׂג לָבָן אֶת־יַעֲקֹב וְיַעֲקֹב תָּקַע אֶת־אָהֳלוֹ בָּהָר וְלָבָן תָּקַע אֶת־אֶחָיו בְּהַר הַגִּלְעָד׃ 26 וַיֹּאמֶר לָבָן לְיַעֲקֹב מֶה עָשִׂיתָ וַתִּגְנֹב אֶת־לִבִּי וַתְנַהֵג אֶת־בְּנֹתַי כִּשְׁבֻיוֹת חָרֶב׃ 27 לָמָּה נַחְבֵּאתָ לִבְרֹחַ וַתִּגְנֹב אֹתִי וְלֹא־הִגַּדְתָּ לִּי וָאֲשַׁלֵּחֲךָ בְּשִׂמְחָה וּבְשִׁרִים בְּתֹף וּבְכִנּוֹר׃ 28 וְלֹא נְטַשְׁתַּנִי לְנַשֵּׁק לְבָנַי וְלִבְנֹתָי עַתָּה

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why did God tell Laban, "Beware of attempting [really: "speaking" (see OJPS)] anything with Jacob, good or bad" (v. 24)? What would be wrong with Laban saying something good to Jacob? Note that this did not stop Laban from speaking quite harshly to Jacob (in v. 26–30) anyway. ✦ Why does Laban ask Jacob "what have you done" (v. 26, OJPS) when he obviously already knows? ✦ Why does he say, "Why did you flee in secrecy and mislead me and not tell me?" (v. 27), repeating the same accusation three times? ✦ Laban tells him, "It was a foolish thing for you to do" (v. 28), but wouldn't foolishness be an excuse?

RASHI does not say Laban pursued him *for* seven days but that he pursued him a *distance* of seven days.

24 Beware of attempting anything with Jacob, good or bad. What the wicked call good is bad to the righteous.

26 Like captives of the sword. "The sword" is a metaphor for an armed force.

27 And mislead me. Literally, "and rob me." The Hebrew idiom for misleading someone is "stealing the mind."

KIMHI **24 God appeared to Laban the Aramean.** For Jacob's sake, just as He had appeared to Abimelech for Abraham's sake. **[C] Beware of attempting anything with Jacob.** Even of speaking to him in order to start a quarrel. **Good or bad.** Whether you take some of his sheep and leave most of them for him—which you would consider your right—or you take most of his sheep in revenge, which even you know is not just.

25 Jacob had pitched his tent on the Height. Rather, "Jacob pitched his tent on the Height" where Laban had overtaken him, to demonstrate that he had stopped fleeing.

28 It was a foolish thing for you to do. Rather, even though you are a wise man, "now you have done something foolish" (compare OJPS).

[C] In 20:3–7. Our texts have Kimhi saying "for Isaac's sake," but God does not speak to Abimelech in that story; see ch. 26.

IBN EZRA **24 God appeared to Laban the Aramean.** Rather, He "*had* appeared to Laban" before he caught up with Jacob. I have already shown you many such cases. As to why God would appear to Laban, this was for Jacob's sake. **Good or bad.** Even if you think it would be good for him to return, you must not "speak" (OJPS) to him about it.

25 Laban with his kinsmen encamped. The translations are correct, though the Hebrew looks as if it might be saying that Laban "pitched" his kinsmen. The "tent" in the clause about Jacob must be understood as the object of the verb here with Laban as well: "Jacob had pitched his tent on the Height, and Laban, with his kinsmen, pitched [his tent] in the hill country."

28 It was a foolish thing for you to do. "To do" is the infinitive construct (though the ת is missing), whose object must be understood: "It was foolish for you to do [this]" or "It was foolish for you to do [so]."

RASHBAM Jacob" (30:36). But now he hurried in pursuit and managed to catch up with Jacob in seven days.

NAHMANIDES told until the third day because on the first day no one realized that Jacob had left. Once Laban was told, he returned to town, gathered his kinsmen from there, pursued Jacob, and caught up with him on the seventh day. If what Genesis Rabbah says is correct, then Jacob left directly from the fields where the flocks were pastured, and Laban must have taken his kinsmen with him when he went to shear his sheep. But according to Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer, Laban did go back to town and round up some fighters before he went in pursuit. **Catching up with him in the hill country of Gilead.** On the evening of the seventh day, Laban reached the foothills of Mount Gilead (compare OJPS) and saw Jacob camping on the mountain, some distance away. He spent the night there and had the dream of v. 24.

24 Laban the Aramean. Emphasizing that even though he was an Aramean (see again Isa. 2:6) this prophetic dream came to him for the sake of Jacob the righteous. The same expression is used in v. 20, where, despite Laban's being an Aramean and having teraphim, Jacob was able to keep him in the dark. **Good or bad.** See Rashi's comment. The straightforward sense is: "Be careful neither to promise good things to him if only he will return to you nor to threaten him with bad things if he will not. I commanded him to return to his land."

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS 13 days to travel; Laban did not go to the place Jacob had left but followed him on a direct line. You can see that Jacob was not fleeing from his slow pace and from the fact that he took every last one of his possessions with him. As for Rashi's idea that Laban covered the same distance in 1 day that Jacob covered in 7; that is midrash. The straightforward explanation is mine (Gersonides).

24 Beware of attempting anything with Jacob, good or bad. Rather, "speak nothing to Jacob" (so far, compare OJPS) "from good to bad." If you want to say something bad but end up speaking good, that is fine. But do not start with good things and end with bad ones. All's well that ends well. — And Laban did not violate this instruction, for that is exactly what he did, beginning (in the words of Prov. 27:5) with "open reproof" and ending with "concealed love" (Abarbanel).

28 You did not even let me kiss my sons and daughters good-by! "Good-by" is not in the Hebrew (see OJPS). This is a different meaning of the verb, as in Ps. 2:12. He is saying, "You did not even let me *supply* them with clothes and goods for the journey (Hizkuni). **It was a foolish thing for you to do.** In contrast to how wisely you have acted until now (Bekhor Shor). Rather, "Was this a foolish thing

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NJPS for you to do. [29]I have it in my power to do you harm; but the God of your father said to me last night, 'Beware of attempting anything with Jacob, good or bad.' [30]Very well, you had to leave because you were longing for your father's house; but why did you steal my gods?"

[31]Jacob answered Laban, saying, "I was afraid because I thought you would take your daughters from me by force. [32]But anyone with whom you find your gods shall not remain alive! In the presence of our kinsmen, point out what I have of yours and take it." Jacob, of course, did not know that Rachel had stolen them.

[33]So Laban went into Jacob's tent and

הִסְכַּלְתָּ עֲשׂוֹ׃ [29] יֶשׁ־לְאֵל יָדִי לַעֲשׂוֹת
עִמָּכֶם רָע וֵאלֹהֵי אֲבִיכֶם אֶמֶשׁ ׀ אָמַר
אֵלַי לֵאמֹר הִשָּׁמֶר לְךָ מִדַּבֵּר עִם־יַעֲקֹב
מִטּוֹב עַד־רָע׃ [30] וְעַתָּה הָלוֹךְ הָלַכְתָּ כִּי־
נִכְסֹף נִכְסַפְתָּה לְבֵית אָבִיךָ לָמָּה גָנַבְתָּ
אֶת־אֱלֹהָי׃
[31] וַיַּעַן יַעֲקֹב וַיֹּאמֶר לְלָבָן כִּי יָרֵאתִי כִּי
אָמַרְתִּי פֶּן־תִּגְזֹל אֶת־בְּנוֹתֶיךָ מֵעִמִּי׃
[32] עִם אֲשֶׁר תִּמְצָא אֶת־אֱלֹהֶיךָ לֹא יִחְיֶה
נֶגֶד אַחֵינוּ הַכֶּר־לְךָ מֶה עִמָּדִי וְקַח־לָךְ
וְלֹא־יָדַע יַעֲקֹב כִּי רָחֵל גְּנָבָתַם׃
[33] וַיָּבֹא לָבָן בְּאֹהֶל יַעֲקֹב ׀ וּבְאֹהֶל לֵאָה

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why would Laban say, "I have it in my power to do you harm" (v. 29), and then admit that God had warned him not to? Wouldn't it have been better for Laban if Jacob thought he had decided on his own to be nice to him? ✦ If Jacob had to leave "because you were longing for your father's house" (v. 30), what was so foolish about that? ✦ Why would Laban mention Jacob's longing for home when he is about to accuse him of stealing his gods? ✦ Why does Jacob respond about "your daughters" (v. 31) but not about the sheep, which are the actual cause of conflict? ✦ Why does Jacob answer so briefly now, when later he will utter a long recitation of what has happened?

RASHI **29 I have it in my power.** See OJPS for a more literal translation. "Power" here is *el*, which elsewhere is used as a name of God, because He is so valiant and mighty.

30 You were longing for your father's house. For the verb, compare also "I *long*, I yearn for the courts of the LORD" (Ps. 84:3); "You would *set Your heart* on Your handiwork" (Job 14:15).

31 I was afraid because I thought you would take your daughters from me by force. He is answering Laban's questions in the order they were asked: "What did you mean by . . . carrying off my daughters?" (v. 26).

32 Anyone with whom you find your gods shall not remain alive! This very curse was the reason Rachel died on the journey. **What I have of yours.** "Of yours" is not in the Hebrew, but that is the sense of the expression.

33 Jacob's tent. Which was also Rachel's; that was where he spent his time. Note

KIMHI **29 The God of your father.** "Your" is plural in Hebrew; "your father" is Abraham, who made God known throughout the world.

30 Why did you steal my gods? The teraphim, which he trusted like the word of God.

32 Anyone with whom you find your gods shall not remain alive! You can kill anyone you find them with. **Point out what I have of yours and take it.** Your gods or anything else.

NAHMANIDES **30 Why did you steal my gods?** See my comment to v. 19.

33 So Laban went into Jacob's tent and Leah's tent . . . Leaving Leah's tent, he entered Rachel's tent. Rashi's comments cannot be correct; a single verse would not call one and the same tent by two different names, first "Jacob's tent" and then "Rachel's

OJPS done foolishly. [29]It is in the power of my hand to do you hurt; but the God of your father spoke unto me yesternight, saying: Take heed to thyself that thou speak not to Jacob either good or bad. [30]And now that thou art surely gone, because thou sore longest after thy father's house, wherefore hast thou stolen my gods?"

[31]And Jacob answered and said to Laban: "Because I was afraid; for I said: Lest thou shouldest take thy daughters from me by force. [32]With whomsoever thou findest thy gods, he shall not live; before our brethren discern thou what is thine with me, and take it to thee."—For Jacob knew not that Rachel had stolen them.—

[33]And Laban went into Jacob's tent, and

RASHBAM **29 The God of your father.** Whom I am treating with respect.

31 I was afraid. He responded to Laban's first question first and to his last question last: "Anyone with whom you find your gods . . ." (v. 32).

32 Anyone with whom you find your gods shall not remain alive! I will personally take revenge directly on him.

33 So Laban went into Jacob's tent and then into **Leah's tent and** then into **the tents of the two maidservants.** Why

IBN EZRA **29 I have it in my power to do you harm.** You will find a slightly different version of the Hebrew word translated "power" here in "I am a *helpless* man" (Ps. 88:5).

30 You were longing for your father's house. The verb is doubled in Hebrew, with a Niphal infinitive (compare the Hebrew of "go to war" in Judg. 11:25) followed by a past tense verb. For another use of this root, see "like a lion *eager* for prey" (Ps. 17:12).

32 Shall not remain alive! I will kill him. But some take this as a kind of prayer—"Let him not remain alive!"—and say it was responsible for Rachel dying on the journey. Let them inform me who prayed for Phinehas's wife to die! **[F]**

33 The tents of the two maidservants. Rather, "the tent" (OJPS) that they

[F] For Rachel's death, see 35:19; for that of Phinehas's wife, also in childbirth, see 1 Samuel 4.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS you did?" After acting so wisely all the time you were with me, do you expect me to believe that you suddenly did something stupid? No! You are wiser than Daniel. You did this deliberately (Abarbanel).

29 I have it in my power to do you harm. That is why your actions were foolish. Even your God knows that I have it in my power to do you harm, which is why He was afraid I would take revenge on you (Bekhor Shor).

30 Why did you steal my gods? You were trying to keep me from finding out what you did. You obviously wouldn't use them yourself; [as Num. 23:23 puts it,] "Jacob is told at once . . . what God has planned" (Abarbanel).

31 I was afraid because I thought you would take your daughters from me by force. Out of your love for them. — At this stage Jacob is still trying to pacify Laban; notice he says nothing about the sheep, not wanting to open a subject that could lead to any accusations (Abarbanel).

32 Anyone with whom you find your gods shall not remain alive! He figured one of the slaves had taken them, to return to idolatry and worship them—which would indeed deserve death (Sforno). **Jacob, of course, did not know that Rachel had stolen them.** Had he known, he would not have said what he said, whether it was a promise or a curse (Bekhor Shor). If he had known, he would have forced her to give them back (Gersonides). He would not have brazenly denied it (Sforno).

33 So Laban went into Jacob's tent and Leah's tent and the tents of the two maidservants; but he did not find them. Leaving Leah's tent, he entered Rachel's tent. The tents were all in order: first Jacob's, then Leah's, then Rachel's, then Bilhah's, then

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NJPS Leah's tent and the tents of the two maidservants; but he did not find them. Leaving Leah's tent, he entered Rachel's tent. [34]Rachel, meanwhile, had taken the idols and placed them in the camel cushion and sat on them; and Laban rummaged through the tent without finding them. [35]For she said to her father, "Let not my lord take it amiss that I cannot rise before you, for the period of women is upon me." Thus he searched, but could not find the household idols.

OJPS into Leah's tent, and into the tent of the two maidservants; but he found them not. And he went out of Leah's tent, and entered into Rachel's tent. [34]Now Rachel had taken the teraphim, and put them in the saddle of the camel, and sat upon them. And Laban felt about all the tent, but found them not. [35]And she said to her father: "Let not my lord be angry that I cannot rise up before thee; for the manner of women is upon me." And he searched, but found not the teraphim.

וּבְאֹהֶל שְׁתֵּי הָאֲמָהֹת וְלֹא מָצָא וַיֵּצֵא מֵאֹהֶל לֵאָה וַיָּבֹא בְּאֹהֶל רָחֵל׃ [34] וְרָחֵל לָקְחָה אֶת־הַתְּרָפִים וַתְּשִׂמֵם בְּכַר הַגָּמָל וַתֵּשֶׁב עֲלֵיהֶם וַיְמַשֵּׁשׁ לָבָן אֶת־כָּל־הָאֹהֶל וְלֹא מָצָא׃ [35] וַתֹּאמֶר אֶל־אָבִיהָ אַל־יִחַר בְּעֵינֵי אֲדֹנִי כִּי לוֹא* אוּכַל לָקוּם מִפָּנֶיךָ כִּי־דֶרֶךְ נָשִׁים לִי וַיְחַפֵּשׂ וְלֹא מָצָא אֶת־הַתְּרָפִים׃

v. 35. מלא ו׳

RASHI how 46:19 calls her "Jacob's wife Rachel"; none of the others is called "Jacob's wife." **He entered Rachel's tent**. He returned to Rachel's tent before searching "the tents of the two maidservants." Why did he go back? He knew she had sticky fingers.

34 The camel cushion. More precisely, as Onkelos translates, "in the *saddle* of the camel" (OJPS). But these were in fact cushioned. Such cushioned packsaddles for camels are mentioned on B. Er. 16a.

RASHBAM did he not find them in Rachel's tent? (See my next comment.) Because when he came out of Leah's tent and came to Rachel's she was sitting on the camel cushion with the teraphim inside it. **Leaving Leah's tent, he entered Rachel's tent**. That is, even though we have just said that he went into "Leah's tent and the tents of the two maidservants," that is not how it happened. He went into Rachel's tent after he left Leah's tent. But because the episode in Rachel's tent was somewhat long, the text did not want to interrupt the verse with it.

KIMHI **35 The period of women**. Literally, the "way" of women—speaking euphemistically, as the text does in 18:11 (though the Hebrew word is different there).

NAHMANIDES tent." Ibn Ezra thinks Laban returned to Leah's tent after searching a single tent shared by the two maidservants. Then he changes his mind and says the episode in Rachel's tent took place immediately after Laban's first and only visit to Leah's tent. This is in fact the correct explanation, except that each of the maidservants did have her own tent, due to Jacob's sense of privacy. He did not want any of the four to know when he had visited a particular one of them. In any case, it would have been forbidden by Torah law for Jacob to have had intercourse with one of them when the other was in the tent; see B. Nid. 17a. Jacob, of course, had his own tent, where all the wives would eat, together with his sons and the other members of the household. When 46:19 calls Rachel specifically "Jacob's wife," in my view that is because she is listed in that genealogy between Zilpah and Bilhah. Notice that in the list of 35:23–26, where she is next to Leah, she is not called "Jacob's wife."

35 Let not my lord take it amiss that I cannot rise before you. I cannot understand this excuse. Do women who are having their period never stand up? But perhaps she was having premenstrual fatigue and depression, which is not uncommon, especially among women (like Rachel) who have not had many children. For their blood is scant and their periods can be very difficult. As I see it, the correct explanation is that in those times menstruating women were kept well away from everyone else (which is what the word for them in Hebrew, *niddah*, etymologically means). They would not approach another person or speak to him. The ancients, in their wisdom, knew that their miasma was dangerous. Scientists have made clear that what their wombs produce is a toxic substance; I will say more about this in my comment to Lev. 18:19. So they would stay by themselves in a tent that no one would enter. As R. Johanan says in the *Baraita de-Niddah*, it is forbidden even to step on the same dust as she, for her tread has made it as unclean as a corpse. So Rachel is saying, "I ought to rise before my lord and kiss his hands, but **the period of women is upon me** and I cannot come close to you. In fact, you must not even enter the tent lest you step where I have stood." He said nothing at all, for they would not even speak with a menstruating woman, since her very speech was impure.

IBN EZRA shared; or perhaps it means "the tent" of each of them. **Leaving Leah's tent**. Which he had reentered. How else could he leave it at this point? It is certainly correct that Jacob had a tent in between the tent of Leah and that of Rachel. **He entered Rachel's tent**. I think he first entered Jacob's tent, then Leah's, then Rachel's, then "the tent" of the two maidservants. But the text has mentioned all the tents but Rachel's first to get them out of the way, since of course Laban found nothing in them; there was nothing to find. By the time he got to Rachel's tent, where the teraphim actually were, she had hidden them.

34 Rachel, meanwhile, had taken the idols and placed them in the camel cushion and sat on them. Some think this "cushion" was a saddle; but note the resemblance of this word to "dromedaries" of Isa. 66:20. That is, Rachel had taken the idols and put them in the place where "the dromedary (the camel)" was and sat on them there—*not* in her tent.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS Zilpah's. Because the main events took place in Rachel's tent, that narrative was left for last; but the second sentence here clarifies the actual order of the tents (Bekhor Shor). What pushed Rashi to say that the maidservants' tent came last? Because that is when it says that "he did not find them." But the tent of Rachel, who was most important to Jacob, was central, between Leah's tent and the maidservants' tent (Hizkuni). He went into Jacob's tent first because he thought Jacob had taken them. It is self-evident that he would have put them in his own tent or in Leah's or Rachel's, not in the tents of the maidservants (Gersonides).

34 Rachel, meanwhile, had taken the idols. Rather, "Rachel took the idols" and hid them when she saw him leave Leah's tent and head toward hers (Hizkuni).

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NJPS 36Now Jacob became incensed and took up his grievance with Laban. Jacob spoke up and said to Laban, "What is my crime, what is my guilt that you should pursue me? 37You rummaged through all my things; what have you found of all your household objects? Set it here, before my kinsmen and yours, and let them decide between us two.

38"These twenty years I have spent in your service, your ewes and she-goats never miscarried, nor did I feast on rams from your flock. 39That which was torn by beasts I never brought to you; I myself made good the loss; you exacted it of me,

36 וַיִּחַר לְיַעֲקֹב וַיָּרֶב בְּלָבָן וַיַּעַן יַעֲקֹב
וַיֹּאמֶר לְלָבָן מַה־פִּשְׁעִי מַה חַטָּאתִי כִּי
דָלַקְתָּ אַחֲרָי׃ 37 כִּי־מִשַּׁשְׁתָּ אֶת־כָּל־כֵּלַי
מַה־מָּצָאתָ מִכֹּל כְּלִי־בֵיתֶךָ שִׂים כֹּה נֶגֶד
אַחַי וְאַחֶיךָ וְיוֹכִיחוּ בֵּין שְׁנֵינוּ׃
38 זֶה ׀ עֶשְׂרִים שָׁנָה אָנֹכִי עִמָּךְ רְחֵלֶיךָ
וְעִזֶּיךָ לֹא שִׁכֵּלוּ וְאֵילֵי צֹאנְךָ לֹא אָכָלְתִּי׃
39 טְרֵפָה ׀ לֹא־הֵבֵאתִי אֵלֶיךָ אָנֹכִי אֲחַטֶּנָּה

OJPS 36And Jacob was wroth, and strove with Laban. And Jacob answered and said to Laban: "What is my trespass? what is my sin, that thou hast hotly pursued after me? 37Whereas thou hast felt about all my stuff, what hast thou found of all thy household stuff? Set it here before my brethren and thy brethren, that they may judge betwixt us two.

38These twenty years have I been with thee; thy ewes and thy she-goats have not cast their young, and the rams of thy flocks have I not eaten. 39That which was torn of beasts I brought not unto thee; I bore the loss of it; of my hand didst thou require it,

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why did Jacob become "incensed" (v. 36) and launch into a tirade? Wasn't he really incensed already in v. 31? Why didn't he say all this the first time? ✦ Why does Jacob say, "What is my crime, what is my guilt"? Hasn't Laban already told him? ✦ Why must Jacob twice mention the "twenty years I have spent" (vv. 38 and 41)? In fact, what need is there to say any of these things?

RASHI **36 That you should pursue me.** The Hebrew verb is not the usual one for "pursue," but you will find it in "Then the Israelites returned from *chasing* the Philistines" (1 Sam. 17:53) and "They *chased* us in the mountains" (Lam. 4:19).

37 Let them decide. That is, let them "judge" (OJPS), let them clarify with whom justice lies.

38 Never miscarried. The Hebrew verb is elsewhere used to mean being bereaved of children; for the sense here, see "a womb that miscarries" (Hosea 9:14) and "their cow calves and never miscarries" (Job 21:10). **Nor did I feast on rams from your flock.** From this verse, the Sages derived that "ram" can refer to a sheep even one day old. Otherwise, what kind of praise would this be? If he didn't eat rams but did eat lambs, that would still be theft.

39 That which was torn by beasts. By a lion or a wolf. "Torn" in this sense implies "by beasts," which is not explicit in the Hebrew. **I myself made good the loss.** The verb meaning "to make good the loss" is a form of the verb that often means "to sin," which more literally means "to miss the mark," as in "Every one of them could sling a stone at a hair and not *miss*" (Judg. 20:16). (Onkelos translates here with the same verb he uses in "not one of us is missing" [Num. 31:49], which uses a different Hebrew verb.) Anything that was missing "would be missing on my account," as the Hebrew is more precisely

KIMHI **36 Now Jacob became incensed.** Because Laban had not believed him but went ahead and searched anyway. True, Jacob had told him to; but he ought to have refrained, out of politeness.

37 My kinsmen. Rather, "my brothers" (compare OJPS), meaning the shepherds and the other men who were with him.

38 Nor did I feast on rams from your flock. Ordinarily shepherds do sometimes eat animals from the flock they are tending. "But I ate only from my own flock—and rams at that." For they are much worse eating than lambs. "Nonetheless I did not eat any even of them." He does not mention the females because ordinarily they are not eaten.

39 You exacted it of me. Rather, "you would exact it of me." Even when a sheep was killed by two wolves—a case that a shepherd is not expected to be able to prevent—I knew that, despite the rule, you would exact it of me.

RASHBAM **38 Your ewes and she-goats never miscarried.** From lack of pasturage or negligent care. **Nor did I feast on rams from your flock.** In the wilderness, shepherds are accustomed to eat some of the male sheep.

39 I myself made good the loss. The א of the verb is missing, but that is quite common. **Snatched.** The *sheva* under the ב shows that these forms are constructs with a superfluous י, as in "Lonely sits the city once *great* with people" (Lam. 1:1). With a *qamatz* under the ב, the same word would mean not "snatching" but "*my* snatching."

IBN EZRA **36 That you should pursue me.** For a more precise understanding of the verb, compare "the wicked in his arrogance *hounds* the lowly" (Ps. 10:2).

39 I myself made good the loss. The Hebrew verb implies, "the sin was on my account, and I made up for the lost animal with one of equal value." **Snatched.** The י is superfluous, as in "*filled* with justice" of Isa. 1:21. **Or.** The Hebrew conjunction is the same one usually translated as "and"; it has a wider range of meanings in Hebrew.

NAHMANIDES **36 Now Jacob became incensed and took up his grievance with Laban.** When Jacob told him, "In the presence of our kinsmen, point out what I have of yours and take it," this obviously included permission to make such a search. Laban could not point out what was his without looking for it. But Jacob had at first been worried that perhaps one of his wives or one of his slaves had in fact stolen the gods. Now that he saw no one had them, he thought, "He didn't lose any gods! That was just a pretext." **What is my crime, what is my guilt that you should pursue me?** Why did you run after me the way a man runs after a thief? You did not find a single one of your belongings with me—even though I had a perfect right to take anything I could get away with. For you changed my wages time and again. And, whatever animals were killed by wild beasts, you made *me* pay for—which is totally illegal.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **36 What is my crime, what is my guilt that you should pursue me?** Jacob is responding directly—now—to Laban's own question of v. 26 (Abarbanel).

38 Your ewes and she-goats never miscarried. Because I never pushed the flock to move hurriedly but led them gently (Hizkuni). **Nor did I feast on rams from your flock.** Shepherds lead their flocks far away to find good pasture, often so far from civilization that there is nowhere to buy provisions (Hizkuni).

39 I myself made good the loss. Of all three categories mentioned in vv. 38–39. I paid you immediately, whether it was my responsibility or not (Abarbanel). **Whether snatched by day or snatched by night.** Technically, the ones snatched by night are the owner's responsibility, not the shepherd's (Hizkuni).

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NJPS whether snatched by day or snatched by night. [40]Often, scorching heat ravaged me by day and frost by night; and sleep fled from my eyes. [41]Of the twenty years that I spent in your household, I served you fourteen years for your two daughters, and six years for your flocks; and you changed my wages time and again. [42]Had not the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the Fear of Isaac, been with me, you would have sent me away empty-handed. But God took notice of my plight and the toil of my hands, and He gave judgment last night."

[43]Then Laban spoke up and said to Jacob, "The daughters are my daughters, the

OJPS whether stolen by day or stolen by night. [40]Thus I was: in the day the drought consumed me, and the frost by night; and my sleep fled from mine eyes. [41]These twenty years have I been in thy house: I served thee fourteen years for thy two daughters, and six years for thy flock; and thou hast changed my wages ten times. [42]Except the God of my father, the God of Abraham, and the Fear of Isaac, had been on my side, surely now hadst thou sent me away empty. God hath seen mine affliction and the labor of my hands, and gave judgment yesternight."

[43]And Laban answered and said unto Jacob: "The daughters are my daughters,

מִיָּדִי תְּבַקְשֶׁנָּה גְּנֻבְתִּי יוֹם וּגְנֻבְתִּי לָיְלָה׃
40 הָיִיתִי בַיּוֹם אֲכָלַנִי חֹרֶב וְקֶרַח בַּלָּיְלָה
וַתִּדַּד שְׁנָתַי מֵעֵינָי׃ 41 זֶה־לִּי עֶשְׂרִים שָׁנָה
בְּבֵיתֶךָ עֲבַדְתִּיךָ אַרְבַּע־עֶשְׂרֵה שָׁנָה
בִּשְׁתֵּי בְנֹתֶיךָ וְשֵׁשׁ שָׁנִים בְּצֹאנֶךָ וַתַּחֲלֵף
אֶת־מַשְׂכֻּרְתִּי עֲשֶׂרֶת מֹנִים׃ 42 לוּלֵי אֱלֹהֵי
אָבִי אֱלֹהֵי אַבְרָהָם וּפַחַד יִצְחָק הָיָה לִי
כִּי עַתָּה רֵיקָם שִׁלַּחְתָּנִי אֶת־עָנְיִי וְאֶת־
יְגִיעַ כַּפַּי רָאָה אֱלֹהִים וַיּוֹכַח אָמֶשׁ׃
43 וַיַּעַן לָבָן וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל־יַעֲקֹב הַבָּנוֹת בְּנֹתַי

RASHI translated. **You exacted it of me**. Rather, "you could exact it of me." I was responsible. **Whether snatched by day or snatched by night**. Day or night, it made no difference. I paid for everything. The י ending on the Hebrew of "snatched" carries no meaning; see similarly the Hebrew of "once *great* with people" (Lam. 1:1); "*filled* with justice" (Isa. 1:21); "*preferred* to thresh" (Hosea 10:11).

40 Scorching heat ravaged me. Literally, "consumed me" (OJPS); compare "a devouring fire" (Deut. 4:24). **Frost**. Compare the use of the same word in "He tosses down *hail* like crumbs" (Ps. 147:17).

41 You changed my wages. You changed the conditions we had agreed to, switching from speckled to spotted and from streaked to mottled.

42 The Fear of Isaac. He did not want to say "the God of Isaac," since the Holy One does not associate His name with the righteous while they are still living. Even though the Holy One Himself said, when Jacob left Beer-sheba, "I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac" (28:13)—because Isaac's eyesight was gone and he was considered as one dead—nonetheless Jacob was afraid to say it himself. **He gave judgment**. Rather, "He gave reproof." It does not mean "decide" here.

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why does Jacob refer to "the Fear of Isaac" (v. 42) and not call Him "the God of Isaac" as the Lord calls Himself in 28:13? ✦ What sense is there in Laban's statement, "the daughters are my daughters, the children are my children, and the flocks are my flocks" (v. 43)? The flocks are certainly in dispute, but no one can deny that the daughters are Laban's daughters and the sons are Jacob's sons!

RASHBAM **42 You would have sent me away empty-handed**. You would certainly not have seen me off with "festive music" (v. 27)!

IBN EZRA **42 The Fear of Isaac**. It was Isaac's fear of the Holy One that aided me. — For a father's merit can aid his son. **Empty-handed**. Note the *–am* adverbial ending, **[G]** which retains its form whether it modifies something masculine or feminine, singular or plural. Other examples are *omnam* ("in truth") and *ḥinam* ("for nothing").

[G] Ibn Ezra identifies this form as a noun; it is not clear why.

KIMHI **40 Often, scorching heat ravaged me by day and frost by night; and sleep fled from my eyes**. But I bore it all because I would not subcontract the flock to another shepherd.

41 I served you fourteen years for your two daughters. Which is completely outside the normal custom of the world. — That is also why they said, "He has sold us" (v. 15).

42 The Fear of Isaac. Rather, "[his] fear about Isaac"—Jacob's fear that he might not find Isaac alive when he returned. **Been with me**. Had not the God of Abraham been with me, **you would have sent me away empty-handed**; had not my fear about Isaac been with me, I would not have been in such a hurry to leave. **He gave judgment last night**. When He told you, "Beware of attempting anything with Jacob, good or bad" (v. 24).

NAHMANIDES **42 The Fear of Isaac**. Rashi follows the view of Onkelos; Ibn Ezra understands the phrase here as referring to Isaac's own fear of the Lord. But in his comment to v. 53, he reverts to the Rashi/Onkelos explanation. Then he switches again, mentioning the idea that this refers to the fear Isaac had when he was bound on the altar and calling it "not implausible." But according to the Way of Truth, the expression is self-explanatory. It refers to the higher divine aspect of justice, of which we are told, "Afterward, the Israelites will turn back and will seek the LORD their God and David their king—and they will *fear* to the LORD and to His bounty in the days to come" (Hosea 3:5). That is, they will seek mercy and the lower aspect of justice, bringing the Fear of Isaac "to the LORD and to His bounty." **He gave judgment last night**. See Rashi's comment. It is more correct to say that it does mean "judgment," since a verb from just this same root is used in "let them *decide* between us two" (v. 37). He is saying now that God, who knows the hidden things, did indeed decide between the two of them. That is why he did not say, "He gave judgment *against you* last night."

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **41 And six years for your flocks**. Like the Hebrew slave of Exod. 21:2 (Hizkuni).

42 The Fear of Isaac. Rather, "and [your] fear of [my father] Isaac," who is rich and powerful. As for Rashi's comment that he did not want to say "God of Isaac" while Isaac was still living, didn't Abraham's servant mention the Tetragrammaton itself in connection with Abraham four times in Genesis 24? (Hizkuni). **You would have sent me away empty-handed**. You are the thief and the cheat, not me (Bekhor Shor).

43 The daughters are my daughters. Seeing that he had no complaint against Jacob, Laban tried to mollify him: "You think I came after you to do you harm? But 'the daughters are my daughters'—they and your children are my own flesh and blood. How could I harm them?" (Bekhor Shor).

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NJPS children are my children, and the flocks are my flocks; all that you see is mine. Yet what can I do now about my daughters or the children they have borne? 44Come, then, let us make a pact, you and I, that there may be a witness between you and me." 45Thereupon Jacob took a stone and set it up as a pillar. 46And Jacob said to his kinsmen, "Gather stones." So they took stones and made a mound; and they partook of a meal

וְהַבָּנִים בָּנַי וְהַצֹּאן צֹאנִי וְכֹל אֲשֶׁר־אַתָּה
רֹאֶה לִי־הוּא וְלִבְנֹתַי מָה־אֶעֱשֶׂה לָאֵלֶּה
הַיּוֹם אוֹ לִבְנֵיהֶן אֲשֶׁר יָלָדוּ: 44 וְעַתָּה
לְכָה נִכְרְתָה בְרִית אֲנִי וָאָתָּה וְהָיָה לְעֵד
בֵּינִי וּבֵינֶךָ: 45 וַיִּקַּח יַעֲקֹב אֶבֶן וַיְרִימֵהָ
מַצֵּבָה: 46 וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב לְאֶחָיו לִקְטוּ
אֲבָנִים וַיִּקְחוּ אֲבָנִים וַיַּעֲשׂוּ־גָל וַיֹּאכְלוּ

OJPS and the children are my children, and the flocks are my flocks, and all that thou seest is mine; and what can I do this day for these my daughters, or for their children whom they have borne? 44And now come, let us make a covenant, I and thou; and let it be for a witness between me and thee." 45And Jacob took a stone, and set it up for a pillar. 46And Jacob said unto his brethren: "Gather stones"; and they took stones, and made a heap. And they did eat there by

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why does Laban ask, "What can I do now about my daughters or the children they have borne?" ✦ Assuming that the mound of v. 47 was the marker of their agreement, why did "Jacob take a stone and set it up as a pillar" (v. 45)?

RASHI **43 Yet what can I do now about my daughters or the children they have borne?** How could I even think of harming them?

44 That there may be a witness between you and me. The Holy One.

46 Jacob said to his kinsmen. Literally, "his brothers" (compare OJPS), but meaning "his sons," who stood by him like brothers in times of trouble and danger.

KIMHI **43 What can I do now about my daughters?** More literally, "as for my daughters, what can I do now about daughters [such as] these?" They are good girls; how can I part from them? **[D]**

45 And set it up as a pillar. Literally, "lifted" it up—high on the mountain so it could be seen from far away.

46 Jacob said to his kinsmen. Possibly meaning "Laban's men" as well, since now they were all at peace with each other.

[D] Some texts say, "How could I fear them?" (a one-letter difference in Hebrew) but this makes little sense.

RASHBAM **43 Yet what can I do?** How can I do anything bad to them?

IBN EZRA **43 Yet what can I do now about my daughters.** About "*these* my daughters" (OJPS); the word is added for clarification.

45 A pillar. The Hebrew word derives from the fact that he "stood" it up.

46 A mound. A *gal* in Hebrew (see v. 48), because they would "roll" (*yigollu*) the stones together to construct it. This mound is what Jacob calls "Mizpah" in v. 49.

NAHMANIDES **43 Yet what can I do now about my daughters or the children they have borne?** The Hebrew here is more difficult than the translations let on: "about my daughters, what can I do about these today?" Some say it means "as for my daughters, what can I do about them?" They compare the unusual syntax of "we two have sworn, we two, we" of 1 Sam. 20:42 and "our sons and our daughters, ours" of Neh. 5:2 and consider "about these" in our verse to have been added for clarity. But it seems more correct to understand the extra "these" in the sentence as Laban letting his feelings of love for them get the better of him. "Here they are, right before my eyes, and I am overcome with compassion for them and for their children, who were born in my house, and whom I think of as my own children." That is why he refers to the children "they have borne." He is defending himself against Jacob's accusation, explaining, "I wanted to see my daughters and to find out whether there was anything I could do for them or for their children. And now I *will* do something good for them, by making you agree not to ill-treat them or take other wives."

44 Let us make a pact, you and I, that there may be a witness. Rashi's idea that this refers to the Holy One is far from what the text says in plain Hebrew. It is the "pact" that will "be for a witness" (OJPS). Whoever violates it brings down on himself all the curses associated with that pact. Compare "they shall serve as signs and proofs against you and your offspring for all time" (Deut. 28:46). Or he may be saying, as NJPS takes it, that they should establish this pact on the basis of a witness that will exist permanently. That would explain why Jacob sets up a stone and says, "This mound shall be witness and this pillar shall be witness" (v. 52). Compare what Joshua says to the people: "See, this very stone shall be a witness against us" (Josh. 24:27).

46 And Jacob said to his kinsmen, "Gather stones." That is, to Laban's kinsmen. For he did not want to say this to his father-in-law, whom he was trying to treat with respect. "His kinsmen" of v. 54 also refers to Laban's kinsmen; see my comment there. You will find a similar expression in "Pharaoh said to his brothers" of 47:3, where "his brothers" does not refer to Pharaoh's own brothers, but to Joseph's. And, after all, it could be that the "kinsmen" whom Laban takes with him in v. 23 are from the family of Abraham's brother Nahor. He might have chosen them because they would not have treated Jacob harshly or tried to rob him. And they, of course, would indeed be Jacob's kinsmen as well as Laban's. Others say that Jacob is calling them "brothers" (compare OJPS) out of politeness, just as he asked the shepherds, "My *friends*, where are you from?" (29:4), which uses the same Hebrew word. Genesis Rabbah says he is referring here to his sons, but they do not explain the "kinsmen" of v. 54 that way. But my very first explanation is the correct one. **So they took stones and made a mound; and they partook of a meal there by the mound.** The Hebrew merely says "they ate" (compare OJPS), that is, symbolically. Or perhaps it was the custom for those who made a pact of this kind to share a loaf of bread, demonstrating their friendship and allegiance. But they did not actually eat a "meal" until v. 54, after the sacrifice. Alternatively, this meal may in fact be the meat from the sacrifice in v. 54. In that case, the point of making the mound would be to have a place to eat after the sacrifice was made. Calling them "to eat bread" (v. 54, OJPS) would then mean that he had prepared a great feast so they would spend the night. Our verse would refer to the sacrificial meat, that verse to the feast they held afterward.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **44 You and I.** In Hebrew word order, "I and thou" (OJPS); the expression occurs also only in 1 Sam. 20:23 and 2 Kings 9:25 (Masorah).

46 So they took stones and made a mound. His sons made a mound around the pillar of v. 45. What Laban says in v. 51 suggests that he and his sons helped too (Gersonides).

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NJPS there by the mound. [47]Laban named it Yegar-sahadutha, but Jacob named it Gal-ed. [48]And Laban declared, "This mound is a witness between you and me this day." That is why it was named Gal-ed; [49]and [it was called] Mizpah, because he said, "May the LORD watch between you and me, when we are out of sight of each other. [50]If you ill-treat my daughters or take other wives besides my daughters—though no one else be about, remember, God Himself will be witness between you and me."

[51]And Laban said to Jacob, "Here is this mound and here the pillar which I have set up between you and me: [52]this mound shall be witness and this pillar shall be witness that I am not to cross to you past this

OJPS the heap. [47]And Laban called it Jegar-sahadutha; but Jacob called it Galeed. [48]And Laban said: "This heap is witness between me and thee this day." Therefore was the name of it called Galeed; [49]and Mizpah, for he said: "The LORD watch between me and thee, when we are absent one from another. [50]If thou shalt afflict my daughters, and if thou shalt take wives beside my daughters, no man being with us; see, God is witness betwixt me and thee."

[51]And Laban said to Jacob: "Behold this heap, and behold the pillar, which I have set up betwixt me and thee. [52]This heap be witness, and the pillar be witness, that I will not pass over this heap to thee, and that

שָׁם עַל־הַגֶּל׃ 47 וַיִּקְרָא־לוֹ לָבָן יְגַר שָׂהֲדוּתָא וְיַעֲקֹב קָרָא לוֹ גַּלְעֵד׃ 48 וַיֹּאמֶר לָבָן הַגַּל הַזֶּה עֵד בֵּינִי וּבֵינְךָ הַיּוֹם עַל־כֵּן קָרָא־שְׁמוֹ גַּלְעֵד׃ 49 וְהַמִּצְפָּה אֲשֶׁר אָמַר יִצֶף יְהוָה בֵּינִי וּבֵינֶךָ כִּי נִסָּתֵר אִישׁ מֵרֵעֵהוּ׃ 50 אִם־תְּעַנֶּה אֶת־בְּנֹתַי וְאִם־תִּקַּח נָשִׁים עַל־בְּנֹתַי אֵין אִישׁ עִמָּנוּ רְאֵה אֱלֹהִים עֵד בֵּינִי וּבֵינֶךָ׃ 51 וַיֹּאמֶר לָבָן לְיַעֲקֹב הִנֵּה ׀ הַגַּל הַזֶּה וְהִנֵּה הַמַּצֵּבָה אֲשֶׁר יָרִיתִי בֵּינִי וּבֵינֶךָ׃ 52 עֵד הַגַּל הַזֶּה וְעֵדָה הַמַּצֵּבָה אִם־אָנִי לֹא־אֶעֱבֹר אֵלֶיךָ אֶת־הַגַּל הַזֶּה וְאִם־אַתָּה

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ What is the meaning of "Mizpah" and what does it refer to (see OJPS and note the brackets in NJPS)? Was this some third object besides the pillar and the mound?

RASHI **47 Yegar-sahadutha.** This is Aramaic for Gal-ed, "Mound of Witness." **Gal-ed.** The Hebrew is actually spelled as a single word: Gilead.

49 And [it was called] Mizpah. Notice the brackets and see OJPS. This is the "Mizpeh of Gilead" (Judg. 11:29) that Jephthah passed through. "Watch" of the next phrase (*yizpeh*) explains how it got this name. **Because he said.** Because each of them said, **May the LORD watch between you and me** to see whether you violate our pact. **When we are out of sight of each other.** More precisely, "when we are hidden from each other" and cannot see each other.

50 If you ill-treat my daughters. By "ill-treating" them is meant withholding sex from them; the verb is related to "conjugal rights" of Exod. 21:10. **Or take other wives besides my daughters.** He repeats "daughters" rather than using a pronoun. For Bilhah and Zilpah were also his daughters, by a concubine.

51 Which I have set up between you and me. Rather, "which I have *thrown* between you and me": "Pharaoh's chariots and his army He has *cast* into the sea" (Exod. 15:4). It is the verb one uses to throw a spear.

52 That I am not to cross. The Hebrew says *im*, which usually means "if"; but it is

KIMHI **47 Laban named it Yegar-sahadutha, but Jacob named it Gal-ed.** Each in his own language, Laban's being Aramaic.

48 Laban declared, "This mound is a witness between you and me this day." He declared this in his own language. Or perhaps he said it in Hebrew, which he might possibly have known from speaking it with Jacob.

50 If you ill-treat my daughters. If they complain about not having something, or if you treat them disrespectfully. Both of these are considered ill-treatment when it comes to respectable women. **Though no one else be about.** There were plenty of other people about just then. What he was saying is, "There is no one about who will be able to reproach you when you are living in some other country by saying to you, 'Didn't you make a covenant with Laban?'"

51 Which I have set up. Or possibly "which I have *instructed* [to be set up]."

52 That I am not to cross. The Hebrew word for "I" has a pausal form here, though there is no pause in the sentence; the punctuation mark is disjunctive, however.

RASHBAM **51 Which I have set up.** Jacob "set it up" (v. 45) at Laban's suggestion. **[F]**

[F] Rashbam compares the use of the verb here with the use of the same verb in Exod. 15:4—but he himself gives it a different meaning there, so his point is unclear.

IBN EZRA **47 Yegar-sahadutha.** This is simply the Aramaic translation of Gal-ed, "Mound of Witness."

49 Because he said. Laban said. Jacob called it Mizpah because Laban said this. **May the LORD watch between you and me.** That is, may He "see" what is going on between us. Compare "I appoint you *watchman* for the House of Israel" (Ezek. 3:17). **When we are out of sight.** And cannot watch each other. May the Lord watch us then.

50 If you ill-treat my daughters. Saadia takes this to mean, "If you do not have sex with your wives"—a bizarre expression whose like we have not heard anywhere else in the Bible. What harm is there in taking it for what it says in plain Hebrew, "if you ill-treat" them, forcing them to do things that they might not want to do?

51 Which I have set up. Which I "threw" together. — For he and his sons threw all the stones into a pile. Compare "Pharaoh's chariots and his army He has *cast* into the sea" (Exod. 15:4).

52 I am not to cross. The verb is metaphorical: "I am not to transgress" the covenant symbolized by this mound. Compare

NAHMANIDES **48 And Laban declared, "This mound is a witness between you and me this day."** Once "Jacob named it Gal-ed" (v. 47), Laban himself used those words, speaking to Jacob in his own language, Hebrew, to emphasize their agreement. Or it may simply be that all Laban's words here are translated into Hebrew.

49 Mizpah. If Rashi is correct, this is a word that refers to a lookout on a mountaintop. But in my opinion it refers to the stone that Jacob erected. As for the difficult syntax, vv. 48–49 should read, "That is why it was named Gal-ed and Mizpah" (compare OJPS). Plausibly this is the "Mizpeh of Gilead" mentioned in Judg. 11:29, so named after this stone.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **47 Jacob named it Gal-ed.** A pun; all this took place on Mount Gilead (Bekhor Shor).

50 Though no one else be about. Rather, "no man being with us" (OJPS) who is qualified to be a witness (Hizkuni).

52 This mound shall be witness and this pillar shall be witness that I am not to cross to you past this mound, and that you are not to cross to me past this mound and this pillar, with hostile intent. Rather, "this mound shall be witness . . . *if* I do not cross to help you when someone approaches you with hostile intent" and vice versa (Hizkuni).

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NJPS mound, and that you are not to cross to me past this mound and this pillar, with hostile intent. 53May the God of Abraham and the god of Nahor"—their ancestral deities—"judge between us." And Jacob swore by the Fear of his father Isaac. 54Jacob then offered up a sacrifice on the Height, and invited his kinsmen to partake of the meal. After the meal, they spent the night on the Height.

32 Early in the morning, Laban kissed his sons and daughters and bade them good-by; then Laban left on his journey homeward. 2Jacob went on his way, and

לֹא־תַעֲבֹר אֵלַי אֶת־הַגַּל הַזֶּה וְאֶת־ הַמַּצֵּבָה הַזֹּאת לְרָעָה׃ 53 אֱלֹהֵי אַבְרָהָם וֵאלֹהֵי נָחוֹר יִשְׁפְּטוּ בֵינֵינוּ אֱלֹהֵי אֲבִיהֶם וַיִּשָּׁבַע יַעֲקֹב בְּפַחַד אָבִיו יִצְחָק׃ 54 וַיִּזְבַּח יַעֲקֹב זֶבַח בָּהָר וַיִּקְרָא לְאֶחָיו לֶאֱכָל־ לֶחֶם וַיֹּאכְלוּ לֶחֶם וַיָּלִינוּ בָהָר׃

לב וַיַּשְׁכֵּם לָבָן בַּבֹּקֶר וַיְנַשֵּׁק לְבָנָיו ✦ פתוח וְלִבְנוֹתָיו וַיְבָרֶךְ אֹתָם וַיֵּלֶךְ וַיָּשָׁב לָבָן לִמְקֹמוֹ׃ 2 וְיַעֲקֹב הָלַךְ לְדַרְכּוֹ וַיִּפְגְּעוּ־בוֹ

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why does Jacob swear "by the Fear of his father Isaac" (v. 53)?

OJPS thou shalt not pass over this heap and this pillar unto me, for harm. 53The God of Abraham, and the God of Nahor, the God of their father, judge betwixt us." And Jacob swore by the Fear of his father Isaac. 54And Jacob offered a sacrifice in the mountain, and called his brethren to eat bread; and they did eat bread, and tarried all night in the mountain.

32 And early in the morning Laban rose up, and kissed his sons and his daughters, and blessed them. And Laban departed, and returned unto his place. 2And Jacob went on his way, and the angels

RASHI sometimes used for "that," as in 24:33. **With hostile intent.** But there is no problem in your crossing it for commercial purposes.

53 The God of Abraham. With a capital *G*. **And the god of Nahor.** With a small *g*. **Their ancestral deities.** Their ancestral "gods," small *g*. **[I]**

54 Jacob then offered up a sacrifice. Rather, he "slaughtered" animals for a feast. **His kinsmen.** His loyal friends among those who were with Laban. **To partake of the meal.** Literally, "to eat *bread*" (OJPS), but the Hebrew word can refer to any kind of food: "Let us destroy the tree with its *fruit*" (Jer. 11:19); "King Belshazzar gave a great *banquet*" (Dan. 5:1).

32:2 Angels of God encountered him. The angels of the land of Israel came to meet him, to accompany him to the land.

[I] Rashi's comment does not specify a plural meaning in this phrase, but his first two comments imply it (contrast OJPS).

KIMHI **53 The God of Abraham.** According to Tractate Soferim, this should also be spelled with a small *g*, being associated here with a false god. **The god of Nahor.** This was an idol that those generations worshiped, in whom Laban believed.

54 His kinsmen. Laban's men.

NAHMANIDES **54 And invited his kinsmen to partake of the meal.** Here too the reference is to Laban's kinsmen. (Rashi understands these same people to be called *Jacob's* kinsmen here, since they were *his* friends as well.) Jacob did not invite Laban to the meal because he was trying to make it seem as if Laban were the host. And see my comments to v. 46.

32:2 Angels of God encountered him. Rashi's comments are surprising. Jacob has not yet reached the land; he is still quite far from it. It was not until well after he sends messengers to Esau in v. 4 that "he crossed the ford of the Jabbok" (v. 23), which, remember, is "the boundary of the Ammonites" (Deut. 3:16), southeast of the land of Israel. At that point, he still has to pass through Ammon and Moab and then Edom. It will not be until he reaches Shechem that he is described as being in the land: "Jacob arrived safe in the city of Shechem *which is in the land of Canaan*" (33:18). This vision of Jacob's is not at the border of his own land but at the border of his enemies, to let him know that there are more on his side than on theirs.

IBN EZRA "they *transgressed* teachings, violated laws, broke the ancient covenant" (Isa. 24:5). **With hostile intent.** Literally, "for harm" (OJPS), that is, to do harm. So some do take "cross" literally to mean crossing this boundary.

53 "May the God of Abraham and the god of Nahor"—their ancestral deities—"judge between us." Jacob swore by the God of Abraham and Laban by the god of Nahor, his grandfather, who was an idol worshiper. As Joshua testified, "Terah, father of Abraham and father of Nahor, lived beyond the Euphrates and worshiped other gods" (Josh. 24:2). **Jacob swore by the Fear of his father Isaac.** By the God whom his father, Isaac, feared. There is an idea that this "fear" is connected specifically with the day on which he was bound on the altar, **[H]** which is not implausible.

32:1 Laban kissed his sons. That is, his grandsons, his daughters' sons.

2 Angels of God encountered him. To help him on the journey. But he alone saw this camp of angels surrounding his own camp.

[H] See Genesis 22.

RASHBAM **32:2 Encountered him.** To protect him, as promised in "I am with you: I will protect you wherever you go" (28:15).

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **53 The God of Abraham and the god of Nahor.** Wash out his mouth! Mentioning the real God and a false god in the same breath! (Bekhor Shor). Said Laban, "You have no right to complain about my combining the two; "the god of Nahor" was the god of Terah, father of both Nahor and Abraham" (Sforno). **And Jacob swore by the Fear of his father Isaac.** Here Jacob indeed did not want to invoke the Holy One after Laban mentioned the "god" of Nahor (Hizkuni). And Isaac was not Terah's son. In this Jacob avoided swearing by the god invoked by Laban (Sforno).

32:2 Angels of God encountered him. Since these angels did not say anything worth recording, apparently they met him simply to give him an honored welcome (Bekhor Shor). Perhaps these were some of the prophets of that era; prophets are also "messengers of God," as the Hebrew literally means. Or it could be that Jacob had a prophetic vision of angels. But we are not told that he had a prophetic vision, so the first explanation seems more plausible (Gersonides). After separating from Laban, Jacob returned to his normal state, seeing angels of God just as he had in the dream of the stairway. He saw right away that (since there was no other content in this prophecy) these angels were agents of providence for him, who would fight his battles. If they were prophets, as Gersonides thinks, why did they come to him and what did they tell him? In fact, there were no known prophets in those days except for Isaac and Jacob (Abarbanel).

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NJPS angels of God encountered him. 3When he saw them, Jacob said, "This is God's camp." So he named that place Mahanaim.

OJPS of God met him. 3And Jacob said when he saw them: "This is God's camp." And he called the name of that place Mahanaim.

מַלְאֲכֵי אֱלֹהִים׃ 3 וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב כַּאֲשֶׁר רָאָם מַחֲנֵה אֱלֹהִים זֶה וַיִּקְרָא שֵׁם־ הַמָּקוֹם הַהוּא מַחֲנָיִם׃ פ

RASHI **3 Mahanaim.** That is, "a pair of camps." One camp of angels from outside the land, who had come with him this far, and one of the angels of the land of Israel who had come to meet him.

IBN EZRA **3 So he named that place Mahanaim.** Which means "a pair of camps"—his own and that of the angels.

KIMHI **32:3 When he saw them.** Compare "As soon as he saw them, he ran from the entrance of the tent to greet them" (18:2). **So he named that place Mahanaim.** Obviously the locals agreed to the change, since we find it called that in Josh. 13:30. The same is true for all the other places named by the Patriarchs: those names stuck. See further my comment to 28:18.

NAHMANIDES **3 Jacob said, "This is God's camp." So he named that place Mahanaim.** "Camp" is *maḥaneh* (one camp, not the two of Mahanaim), but that is how names work. Or it may mean his camp and the angels' camp, to indicate that both were camps of God, blessing Him and acknowledging His unity. May His name be blessed forever!

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **3 When he saw them, Jacob said, "This is God's camp."** He was apparently quite familiar with them (Bekhor Shor). **So he named that place Mahanaim.** Whatever he saw, it was "God's camp," like his own (Gersonides).

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VA-YISHLAḤ

וישלח

NJPS [4]Jacob sent messengers ahead to his brother Esau in the land of Seir, the country of Edom, [5]and instructed them as follows, "Thus shall you say, 'To my lord Esau, thus says your servant Jacob: I stayed with Laban and

OJPS [4]And Jacob sent messengers before him to Esau his brother unto the land of Seir, the field of Edom. [5]And he commanded them, saying: "Thus shall ye say unto my lord Esau: Thus saith thy servant Jacob: I have sojourned with Laban, and stayed until

4 וַיִּשְׁלַח יַעֲקֹב מַלְאָכִים לְפָנָיו אֶל־עֵשָׂו
אָחִיו אַרְצָה שֵׂעִיר שְׂדֵה אֱדוֹם: 5 וַיְצַו
אֹתָם לֵאמֹר כֹּה תֹאמְרוּן לַאדֹנִי לְעֵשָׂו
כֹּה אָמַר עַבְדְּךָ יַעֲקֹב עִם־לָבָן גַּרְתִּי וָאֵחַר

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ "Jacob sent messengers ahead to his brother Esau" (v. 4)—for what purpose? ✦ Why does Jacob send messengers rather than going himself? That is certainly what Esau will be asking! ✦ What is the point of the double subservience of "To my lord Esau, thus says your servant Jacob" (v. 5)? ✦ Why would Esau care if Jacob had been staying "with Laban" or with somebody else? ✦ Why does the message say that Jacob had "remained until now"—isn't this obvious?

RASHI **4 Jacob sent messengers.** Rather, "angels," just as the Hebrew word says. **In the land of Seir.** Rather, "to the land of Seir" (see OJPS). The final ה here is the equivalent of the preposition ל.

5 I stayed with Laban. More precisely, I "sojourned" with him (OJPS)—I never became an important leader there but was always considered a mere sojourner, a temporary resident. So it is not worth your hating me for the blessing Father gave me: "Be master over your brothers" (27:29). That has not been fulfilled.

KIMHI **4 In the land of Seir.** He had heard that Esau was there—not that he lived there with his family; his home was then still in Canaan. He does not move to Seir until 36:6.

RASHBAM **5 And instructed them as follows.** He instructed them to say the following words. But the messengers did not know how worried he was. **I stayed with Laban.** I went there, as you know, on my father's and mother's instructions. — He did not want Esau to think, "He was fleeing from me." **And remained.** As happens in a certain category of 1st-א verbs, the א indicating "I" here has displaced the א of the root.

IBN EZRA **4 Jacob sent messengers ahead to his brother Esau in the land of Seir, the country of Edom.** We know, therefore, that Edom is between Haran and the land of Israel. This is a refutation of Saadia, who said that Sinai, Seir, and Paran are all in the same vicinity. (These "messengers" are simply servants of his, not the "angels" described by the same Hebrew word in v. 2.)

5 Thus shall you say, "To my lord Esau." Rather, "Thus shall you say to my lord Esau" (compare OJPS). He is letting them know that Esau is his lord and they should address him politely, as a servant speaks with a master. **And remained until now.** The א of the verb indicates the first-person singular; the unusual vowel underneath it replaces the א of the root. For a comparable form, see "Those who love me *I love*" (Prov. 8:17). It is simply too difficult to pronounce both *aleph*s. (This is a Qal verb, by the way.)

NAHMANIDES This parashah was written to make known that the Holy One rescued Jacob and "redeemed him from one too strong for him" (Jer. 31:11) by sending an angel to rescue him. It teaches us further that Jacob did not rely on his own righteousness but tried as hard as he could to save himself. There is an allusion to the future in it as well, since everything that happened to our Patriarch Jacob with his brother Esau will happen over and over again to us with the descendants of Esau. We must hold to the way of our righteous ancestor and prepare ourselves in the same three ways that he did, being ready to pray, to pay off our enemies, and to fight them or flee from them. Our Sages were aware of this, as I shall point out. **[A]**

4 To his brother Esau in the land of Seir. Since the south of Israel borders Edom and his father was "settled in the region of the Negeb" (24:62), he had to cross Edom or at least pass nearby. Being afraid Esau might hear, he went ahead and sent messengers to his land to tell him in advance. Genesis Rabbah tagged him with the description "one who seizes a dog by its ears" (Prov. 26:17): said the Holy One, "Esau is minding his own business and you insist on sending him a message?" But in my view, this too hints that our downfall began with Edom. For the kings of the Second Temple period made an agreement with the Romans. **[B]** Some of them even went to Rome, and that was how they fell into their hands. This is mentioned in rabbinic literature and is well known from other books.

5 Thus shall you say, "To my lord Esau, thus says your servant Jacob." He commanded them to address Esau as "my lord," which is as much as to say that they belonged to him or at least had been sent to him. We see from v. 18 that Jacob expected him to ask, "Whose man are you?" But it is not impossible to read our verse this way: "Thus shall you say to my lord Esau: 'thus says your servant Jacob.'" For Jacob might have wanted to call him "my lord Esau" in front of them, to warn them that they must not mention Esau even behind his back except in the most respectful possible way, just as their own master did. You must understand that this attitude of Jacob's, though based on fear, ultimately derived from the custom for a younger son to address the first-born the same way he would talk to his father; the Torah itself alludes to this. **[C]** Jacob had taken both his birthright and his blessing, and Esau held a grudge against him for it. Now Jacob was demonstrating that he was ready to ignore the fact that he had bought the birthright and to treat him like the first-born, to remove the grudge from his heart.

[A] See Nahmanides' comment to 33:15. **[B]** Edom is understood to symbolize Rome. **[C]** According to the interpretation on B. Ket 103a of "Honor your father and your mother" (Exod. 20:12).

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS The "angels of God" (v. 2) he had just seen alerted Jacob that, as Prov. 26:13 would put it, there was "a lion on the loose." But it is quite possible that he met a caravan whose members told him that Esau was heading toward him on precisely that road. Since from Jacob's perspective they were divine messengers, the text calls them "angels of God" (Abarbanel).

4 Jacob sent messengers ahead to his brother Esau. To find out what was on his mind—without giving anything away themselves (Bekhor Shor). He was afraid that a great man like Esau would find it demeaning for his wandering brother to suddenly show up like a beggar (Abarbanel). **In the land of Seir.** Which Esau inherited when he married Oholibamah; see 36:2 and 20 (Hizkuni).

5 To my lord Esau. You will find that Jacob called Esau "my lord" eight times in this section, corresponding to the eight Edomite kings of 36:31–39 (Hizkuni). **I stayed with Laban.** I left home for no other reason than to earn a living (Bekhor Shor). If I had stayed with anyone but our uncle, I would have nothing (Hizkuni). **And remained until now.** I did not want to return empty-handed (Bekhor Shor). Don't be upset that I did not come to visit; I had a job and couldn't (Hizkuni).

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NJPS remained until now; [6]I have acquired cattle, asses, sheep, and male and female slaves; and I send this message to my lord in the hope of gaining your favor.'" [7]The messengers returned to Jacob, saying, "We came to your brother Esau; he himself is coming to meet you, and there are four hundred men with him." [8]Jacob was greatly frightened; in his anxiety, he divided the people with him, and the flocks and herds and camels,

עַד־עָתָּה׃ 6 וַיְהִי־לִי שׁוֹר וַחֲמוֹר צֹאן
וְעֶבֶד וְשִׁפְחָה וָאֶשְׁלְחָה לְהַגִּיד לַאדֹנִי
לִמְצֹא־חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ׃ 7 וַיָּשֻׁבוּ הַמַּלְאָכִים
אֶל־יַעֲקֹב לֵאמֹר בָּאנוּ אֶל־אָחִיךָ אֶל־עֵשָׂו
וְגַם הֹלֵךְ לִקְרָאתְךָ וְאַרְבַּע־מֵאוֹת אִישׁ
עִמּוֹ׃ 8 וַיִּירָא יַעֲקֹב מְאֹד וַיֵּצֶר לוֹ וַיַּחַץ
אֶת־הָעָם אֲשֶׁר־אִתּוֹ וְאֶת־הַצֹּאן וְאֶת־

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why would Jacob think that telling Esau he had stayed with Laban and "acquired cattle, asses, sheep, and male and female slaves" (v. 6) would gain Esau's favor? ✦ Why are we told that "the messengers returned to Jacob" (v. 7) without being told whether they had spoke to Esau, and what he had replied? ✦ Who told them that "he himself is coming to meet you"? ✦ What is the point of saying "moreover [OJPS], he himself is coming to meet you"? ✦ Since the Holy One told Jacob in 28:15, "I will protect you wherever you go," and even quite recently, in 31:3, told him, "Return to the land of your fathers where you were born, and I will be with you," why is Jacob "greatly frightened" (v. 8)? ✦ Why does the Holy One not simply tell Jacob, as He will later in 46:3, "Fear not"?

OJPS now. [6]And I have oxen, and asses and flocks, and menservants and maid-servants; and I have sent to tell my lord, that I may find favor in thy sight." [7]And the messengers returned to Jacob, saying: "We came to thy brother Esau, and moreover he cometh to meet thee, and four hundred men with him." [8]Then Jacob was greatly afraid and was distressed. And he divided the people that was with him, and the flocks, and the herds,

RASHI **6 I have acquired cattle, asses, sheep**. Father said to me, "May God give you of the dew of heaven and the fat of the earth" (27:28), but these animals neither come from heaven nor grow out of the earth. — Note that the Hebrew words for the animals are singular, in accordance with Hebrew idiom. We say "the cock has crowed," not "the cocks have crowed." **And I send this message to my lord** to let you know that I am coming **in the hope of gaining your favor**. For I come in peace and want to be friends with you.

7 We came to your brother Esau. *You* call him your brother, but *he* treats you as if he were Esau the wicked; he still maintains his hatred of you.

8 In his anxiety. The Hebrew is a verb, but the passive "and was distressed" of OJPS is misleading. It is a Hiphil, a causative verb: "he caused Jacob to feel distressed." Jacob was afraid of being killed and distressed that he himself might have to kill.

RASHBAM **7 We came to your brother Esau**. And you have gained his favor, as you asked. **He himself is coming to meet you**. And in addition (see "moreover" of OJPS) he himself is coming to meet you out of his joy at your coming and his love for you. **And there are four hundred men with him**. All to honor you. — That is the essence of the straightforward sense. Compare Exod. 4:14, where Moses is told that Aaron speaks readily and *"also* is setting out *to meet you,* and he will be happy to see you."

8 Jacob was greatly frightened. But he kept this to himself. Even though Esau had demonstrated to the messengers that he intended to treat Jacob with respect, Jacob did not believe that Esau had good intentions but assumed that he really intended to do him harm. **In his anxiety**. Not a noun in Hebrew, but a verb from a geminate root,

KIMHI **6 Cattle, asses**. For more examples of plurals indicated by the singular noun, see "the men of Israel were distressed" (1 Sam. 14:24), "the horses are tethered" (2 Kings 7:10), and many others of the same kind. **In the hope of gaining your favor**. I know that you will look favorably on me when I show you how well I am doing.

7 Your brother Esau. He is still Esau, and still hates you.

8 Jacob was greatly frightened; in his anxiety . . . The Hebrew is really a pairing of two verbs: "Jacob was greatly afraid and was distressed" (OJPS), indicating how frightened

IBN EZRA **6 Cattle, asses**. The Hebrew uses singular nouns, expressing here the name of the species. **Male and female slaves**. These too are referred to in the singular. **And I send this message to my lord**. That I intend to do whatever you command **in the hope of gaining your favor**.

7 He himself is coming to meet you. He had been told that you were on your way.

8 Jacob was greatly frightened. Despite his physical strength.

NAHMANIDES **6 I send this message to my lord in the hope of gaining your favor**. The point of Rashi's comment is to suggest that the "message" was simply that Jacob hoped to gain his favor. But it is more correct to take it as following naturally from what he has just said. He wanted to let him know, "I have plenty of money and status—with which I hope to gain your favor." He is hinting that he will send him some of his wealth as a gift or even that Esau should take what he likes. The exchange in 33:8 says this explicitly.

7 The messengers returned to Jacob. Having completed their mission; the text did not need to tell us this. **He himself is coming to meet you**. Literally, he is "also" coming to meet you, just as you are going to meet him. You will encounter each other very soon.

8 Jacob was greatly frightened. Hearing that Esau was on his way with 400 armed men, Jacob was afraid for his life, thinking "He would not have brought 400 armed men unless he intended to fight me." To me, it implies that Esau did not actually receive the messengers or pay them any mind, not having given them permission to come and speak with him. The text would have told us that Esau asked how he was and told them to let Jacob know he was coming to see him. But the text does not tell us that the messengers brought

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **6 I have acquired cattle, asses, sheep, and male and female slaves**. As to Rashi's comment about the cattle and the asses being neither from heaven nor from earth—he must be kidding. They are clearly, just as Isaac blessed him in 27:28, "of the dew of heaven, and the fatness of the earth" (Abarbanel). **I send this message to my lord in the hope of gaining your favor**. I wanted you to know that I have been engaged in productive work. — The point of all this was to convey, "As far as I know, there is nothing between us but love and friendship" (Bekhor Shor).

7 The messengers returned to Jacob. Apparently they did not get as far as Seir, but encountered Esau on the way (Abarbanel). **We came to your brother Esau**. They assumed he was coming to give Jacob a brotherly greeting. But (see v. 8) Jacob was not fooled (Abarbanel). **He himself is coming to meet you, and there are four hundred men with him**. Whether for good or for evil we do not know. He would not respond to us. All he said was, "I am going to meet him and will speak with him face to face. Since I am going to speak to him directly, what is the point of my speaking to you?" (Bekhor Shor).

8 Jacob was greatly frightened; in his anxiety. He "was distressed" (OJPS) because he did not know what to do. If Esau's intentions were evil, he needed to barricade himself in, or flee; but if Esau's intentions were good, this would be extremely suspicious

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NJPS into two camps, [9]thinking, "If Esau comes to the one camp and attacks it, the other camp may yet escape."

[10]Then Jacob said, "O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, O

הַבָּקָר וְהַגְּמַלִּים לִשְׁנֵי מַחֲנוֹת׃ 9 וַיֹּאמֶר
אִם־יָבוֹא עֵשָׂו אֶל־הַמַּחֲנֶה הָאַחַת וְהִכָּהוּ
וְהָיָה הַמַּחֲנֶה הַנִּשְׁאָר לִפְלֵיטָה׃
10 וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב אֱלֹהֵי אָבִי אַבְרָהָם וֵאלֹהֵי

OJPS and the camels, into two camps. [9]And he said: "If Esau come to the one camp, and smite it, then the camp which is left shall escape."

[10]And Jacob said: "O God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac, O

RASHI **9 If Esau comes to the one camp and attacks it.** The Hebrew word *maḥaneh* ("camp") is sometimes treated as masculine and sometimes as feminine (contrast, e.g., 33:8 with Ps. 27:3). The same is true for *shemesh* ("sun"), *ruaḥ* ("wind"), and *esh* ("fire"). Here in our phrase, "one" is feminine and "it" is masculine. **The other camp may yet escape.** Rather it "shall" escape (OJPS) whether he wants it to or not, for I will fight him. — Jacob was prepared for three eventualities: to give him a gift (see v. 22), to pray (see v. 10), and to fight (our own verse).

10 O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, O LORD, who said to me. In 31:42 Jacob calls Him "the Fear of Isaac." And he might simply have said, "O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, who said to me" and so forth. But adding the Tetragrammaton shows that his intent was to say, "You gave me two

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why does Jacob divide his people and his livestock "into two camps"? If he is getting ready to fight, he would be better off maintaining his strength. And in fact when they cross the Jabbok in v. 23, everyone is back together in a single camp. ✦ Shouldn't "Jacob said" of v. 10 really be "Jacob prayed" or "Jacob cried out"? ✦ Why does he address the Holy One both as "God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac" and as "LORD"? ✦ Why does Jacob not mention God's promise in 28:15 that "I will protect you wherever you go and will bring you back to this land," which would seem to be the most pertinent promise at this moment?

RASHBAM where the repeated second root letter is dropped in some forms. **He divided.** Here the missing third letter of the root is not a repetition of the second but a ה.

9 The other camp may yet escape. The camps would be far enough apart that if they saw that things were going badly they would have time to flee. Note that "the one camp" is treated as grammatically feminine, but "the other camp" uses a masculine form. In fact we have found many words that are sometimes treated as masculine and sometimes as feminine.

10 O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac. To use the same language with which You described Yourself when I left Beer-sheba (in 28:13).

KIMHI he was. **Into two camps.** Says R. Hiyya: The Torah teaches you the way of the world. One should not keep all one's wealth in a single place.

10 I will deal bountifully with you. What He said was "I will be with you" (31:3). As we have already pointed out, when the text repeats something it repeats the meaning but not necessarily the exact same words.

IBN EZRA **9 The other camp may yet escape.** Either because they could run away, or because his brother's anger would be assuaged after attacking the first camp, or because "relief and deliverance" (Esther 4:14) might come to them from the Holy One. Compare "If the Arameans prove too strong for me, you might come to my aid" (2 Sam. 10:11). Rashi's comment that the other camp would escape whether Esau wanted it to or not is midrashic. Granted, the Holy One had told him, "Your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth" (28:14), but Jacob did not know whether these would come from the children he had now or from others. When Joseph was sold, his father Jacob knew nothing about it—for a prophet does not know hidden things unless they are revealed to him by the Holy One. Elisha himself said, "The LORD has hidden it from me and has not told me" (2 Kings 4:27). This is also my response to those who ask how Jacob could be afraid when the Holy One had told him, "I will be with you" (31:3).

10 I will deal bountifully with you. The same explanation applies. He might be

NAHMANIDES Jacob any message at all from Esau. So it would seem that he was still angry and brought these forces to do Jacob some harm. The messengers had at least had the opportunity to reconnoiter and find out that he and the 400 men were on their way. That is another implication of "also" (v. 7): not only did he not receive us or send you any message, he is "also" coming in force. **In his anxiety.** Rather, this is a second verb (see OJPS). He was already somewhat frightened; after hearing this report from the messengers, he was even more "distressed." The Sages point to this explanation with the distinction they make between "your brother" and "Esau" (both v. 7) in the reply of the messengers. But eventually, when he saw how respectfully Jacob treated him, and how he prostrated himself, Esau was overcome with feeling toward his brother and realized, as I said, that Jacob was acknowledging that Esau was the elder and the first-born. So Esau was reconciled with him. For minds are under the Lord's control; He can direct them as he wishes.

9 The other camp may yet escape. The straightforward sense must indeed be that the other camp "may" escape, not that it "shall" escape, as OJPS translates. They might have time to flee, or Esau's anger might subside, or the Holy One might rescue them. As for Rashi's comment, I have seen a midrash explaining that they wore white clothing but concealed weapons underneath it. So Rashi is in essence correct. The meaning "shall" very much applied in the sense that Jacob knew that not all his offspring could fall into Esau's hands, so at least one of the camps would have to escape. For us, the implication is that Esau will never decide to exterminate us completely, but will do some evil to us in some of their countries. One king issues a decree confiscating our wealth or threatening our lives, and another king elsewhere takes pity and rescues the refugees.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS (Bekhor Shor). He was "frightened" of Esau and "distressed" about the 400 men. But this was not for lack of faith; like one who wants to eat pork but refrains because it is forbidden, Jacob's faith in God's promise enabled him to overcome his physical fear. As Aristotle says in the *Ethics*, true bravery is not the lack of fear but the choice to press on despite one's fear. In fact, there are comparable examples every day, when a person must force himself to drink some disgusting medicine that he knows intellectually is good for him (Abarbanel). **He divided the people with him, and the flocks and herds and camels, into two camps.** Taking a protective measure that Esau would not necessarily recognize as one (Bekhor Shor). He put the people—his wives and children—in the camp on the opposite side of the stream, and the livestock on the side where he thought Esau was approaching; Esau might think that was all Jacob had. But of course the people were much more important (Abarbanel).

9 If Esau comes to the one camp. Some explain the feminine form of "one" here by understanding the phrase as "If Esau comes to the camp of one [of the wives]" (Hizkuni). **The other camp may yet escape.** It will not occur to Esau that I have two camps (Hizkuni).

10 Jacob said. Notice that he did not "pray" or "cry out" but simply "said" this, as if to himself to calm his senseless fear (Abarbanel).

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NJPS LORD, who said to me, 'Return to your native land and I will deal bountifully with you'! [11]I am unworthy of all the kindness that You have so steadfastly shown Your servant: with my staff alone I crossed this Jordan, and now I have become two camps. [12]Deliver me, I pray, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau; else, I fear, he may come and strike me down,

אָבִי יִצְחָק יְהוָה הָאֹמֵר אֵלַי שׁוּב לְאַרְצְךָ
וּלְמוֹלַדְתֶּךָ וְאֵיטִיבָה עִמָּךְ׃ 11 קָטֹנְתִּי מִכֹּל
הַחֲסָדִים וּמִכָּל־הָאֱמֶת אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתָ אֶת־
עַבְדֶּךָ כִּי בְמַקְלִי עָבַרְתִּי אֶת־הַיַּרְדֵּן הַזֶּה
וְעַתָּה הָיִיתִי לִשְׁנֵי מַחֲנוֹת׃ 12 הַצִּילֵנִי נָא
מִיַּד אָחִי מִיַּד עֵשָׂו כִּי־יָרֵא אָנֹכִי אֹתוֹ

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ What does Jacob mean by saying, "I am too small," which the translations take as "I am unworthy" (v. 11)? ✦ How does calling himself "unworthy" justify his prayer for deliverance? ✦ When Jacob says, "Deliver me, I pray, from the hand of my brother" (v. 12), why doesn't the Holy One reply to him?

OJPS LORD, who saidst unto me: Return unto thy country, and to thy kindred, and I will do thee good; [11]I am not worthy of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which Thou hast shown unto Thy servant; for with my staff I passed over this Jordan; and now I am become two camps. [12]Deliver me, I pray Thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau; for I fear him, lest he come and smite me, the

RASHI promises. One was when I left my father's house in Beer-sheba, where You said to me, 'I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac' [28:13] and You promised, 'I will protect you wherever you go' [28:15]. Then, in Laban's house, You said to me, 'Return to the land of your fathers where you were born' [31:3]; but there You revealed Yourself to me by means of the Tetragrammaton alone, for that command is introduced with the words, 'the LORD said to Jacob' [31:3]. So I come before You now holding both those promises."

11 I am unworthy of all the kindness. More literally, "I have become smaller from all the kindness." My merits have been diminished through all the steadfast kindness You have shown me. So I am afraid that perhaps since You gave me those promises I have indulged in **[A]** some sin that would cause me to be handed over to Esau. **Steadfastly.** In the Hebrew this is a second prepositional phrase: "of all the mercies, and of all the truth" (OJPS), meaning "the truth of Your words." — For You did keep all the promises You gave me. **With my staff alone.** I had neither silver, gold, nor livestock; just my staff alone. — But according to a midrash, "with my staff alone I crossed this Jordan" means that he used his staff to split the Jordan.

12 From the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau. From the hand of my brother, who does not treat me as my brother would, but as Esau the wicked would.

[A] Some texts of Rashi have a similar-sounding word meaning "I have been stained by."

RASHBAM **11 I am unworthy.** The translations understand the sense of this expression correctly. Compare the nonmetaphoric usage of the same Hebrew verb in "too small to hold the burnt offerings" (1 Kings 8:64). **All the kindness that You have so steadfastly shown Your servant.** More than I deserved, since I have not yet fulfilled my vow and worshiped as I should. That is why I am afraid despite Your promises. For You judge a man according to his actions. — We find this with Hezekiah, to whom the prophet Isaiah said, "You are going to die; you will not get well" (2 Kings 20:1/Isa. 38:1). But after Hezekiah's prayer, the Holy One granted him an extra 15 years of life.

12 Else, I fear, he may come and strike me down. Since I am unworthy of all the kindness that You have shown me. (See my comments to the previous verse.)

NAHMANIDES **11 I am unworthy of all the kindness that You have so steadfastly shown Your servant.** Rashi's comment does not really fit the text. Moreover, Jacob in v. 13 seems to think that he still can expect to receive further kindness. Since the "kindness" he describes here did not occur after the promise of v. 10, which was given him at the end of his stay in Haran, there was no reason to think the merits available to him had diminished since he left for Canaan. The words of Amos, "O Lord GOD, pray forgive. How will Jacob survive? He is so small" (Amos 7:2) make clear that the translation "unworthy" is indeed correct. As for "the mercies" and "the truth" (as OJPS more helpfully translates), the former are the good things He did for him without having promised; the latter refers to making the things He did promise come true. He was not worthy of getting even what he was promised, let alone more. (I do not understand Onkelos here; most unusually for him, he translates *emet* as "goods" rather than "truth.") In fact, calling enduring kindness "steadfast" is quite a good translation of the word, which implies reliability, as other uses of the same root demonstrate: "Your house and your kingship shall ever be *secure* before you" (2 Sam. 7:16); "With his food supplied and his drink *assured*" (Isa. 33:16); "Like waters that cannot be *relied* on" (Jer. 15:18).

12 And strike me down, mothers and children alike. Some explain it to mean "and strike me *and strike* the mothers with the children." There are many comparable cases.

IBN EZRA the only one who would escape. We also know that any sin can be small or great corresponding to the stature of the one who commits it; a "small" sin can be a great one when committed by a great man. Jacob was afraid that he had sinned (or even simply erred) in his thoughts and that this might mean the Holy One was not "with him" after all. Don't be surprised. Take Moses, than whom there was none higher, and whom He sent to bring the Israelites out of Egypt. Because he erred, the Holy One sent an angel to take his life. **[A]**

11 I am unworthy. Literally, "I am too small" to deserve all this. **All the kindness that You have so steadfastly shown.** I have explained "the mercies" and "the truth" (OJPS) in my comment to "true kindness" (24:49).

12 He may come and strike me down, mothers and children alike. "Strike" takes "mothers and children" as its object as well as "me." See also 2 Sam. 4:2, where the two men are "commanders of companies, [commanders of] Saul's son."

[A] See Exod. 4:24–26.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **11 All the kindness that You have so steadfastly shown Your servant.** For the combination of "mercies" and "truth" (OJPS), see what David says to Ittai in 2 Sam. 15:20: "Go back, and take your kinsmen with you, [in] *true faithfulness*" (Hizkuni). **With my staff alone I crossed this Jordan.** To fend off dogs (Gersonides).

12 From the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau. "Brother" alone might have been interpreted as some "kinsman"; "Esau" by itself might have meant some other Esau (Hizkuni). **Mothers and children alike.** The Hebrew phrase also occurs only in Hosea 10:14 (Masorah). One "mother" (OJPS) along with two or three of "the children." But he knew from the Holy One's promise that not all of them would be killed (Bekhor Shor). On the contrary, the implication of the idiom is that there would be no one left; that would be striking "me" down because they all belonged to him. Ibn Ezra's explanation is not impossible, but it is less plausible (Gersonides). Jacob was worried that Esau might show up on the side of the stream where the mothers and children were camped. In fact, the Holy One arranged for precisely this to happen, which resulted in both camps being saved. As Prov. 19:21 tells us, "Many designs are in a man's mind, but it is the LORD's plan that is accomplished" (Abarbanel).

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NJPS mothers and children alike. [13]Yet You have said, 'I will deal bountifully with you and make your offspring as the sands of the sea, which are too numerous to count.'"

[14]After spending the night there, he selected from what was at hand these presents for his brother Esau: [15]200 she-goats and 20 he-goats; 200 ewes and 20 rams;

OJPS mother with the children. [13]And Thou saidst: I will surely do thee good, and make thy seed as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude."

[14]And he lodged there that night; and took of that which he had with him a present for Esau his brother: [15]two hundred she-goats and twenty he-goats, two hundred ewes and twenty rams,

פֶּן־יָבוֹא וְהִכַּנִי אֵם עַל־בָּנִים׃ [13] וְאַתָּה אָמַרְתָּ הֵיטֵב אֵיטִיב עִמָּךְ וְשַׂמְתִּי אֶת־ זַרְעֲךָ כְּחֹול הַיָּם אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יִסָּפֵר מֵרֹב׃ [14] וַיָּלֶן שָׁם בַּלַּיְלָה הַהֻוא וַיִּקַּח מִן־הַבָּא בְיָדֹו מִנְחָה לְעֵשָׂו אָחִיו׃ [15] עִזִּים מָאתַיִם וּתְיָשִׁים עֶשְׂרִים רְחֵלִים מָאתַיִם וְאֵילִים

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Doesn't "You have said, 'I will deal bountifully with you'" (and so forth, v. 13) belong with v. 10, as the *introduction* to his prayer? ("Yet" is not in the Hebrew.) ✦ What does "after spending the night there" have to do with "he selected from what was at hand these presents" (v. 14)? ✦ Shouldn't he have selected the presents before going to sleep? ✦ Why are the animals of vv. 15–16 all listed in pairs of females and males? Does Esau, like Noah, have some need "to keep seed alive upon all the earth" (7:3)?

RASHI **13 I will deal bountifully with you.** The double form of the Hebrew verb implies: through your own merit and through the merit of your ancestors. **And make your offspring as the sands of the sea.** But where did He say this? What He really told Jacob was, "Your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth" (28:14). But He also told him, "I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised with regard to you" (see 28:15), and He had promised Abraham, "I will . . . make your descendants as numerous as the stars of heaven and the sands on the seashore" (22:17).

14 From what was at hand. Rather, "from what was under his authority," as when Sihon took from the king of Moab all the land that was "in his hand" (Num. 21:26). But the midrash takes it literally, understanding it to refer to precious stones and pearls of the kind that one literally keeps in a small pouch that fits in one's hand.

15 200 she-goats and 20 he-goats. 200 she-goats require 20 he-goats. The same is true for the rest of these animals; there are just enough males for the needs of the females. Genesis Rabbah utilizes these verses to determine the nature of the "conjugal rights" mentioned in Exod. 21:10—for those at leisure, once a day; for workers, twice a week; for ass drivers, once a week; for camel drivers, once a month; and for seafarers, once every six months. (I cannot quite figure out how they get each of these ratios from the verse.) It seems to me that what we learn from these verses is that conjugal rights are not the same for everyone, but depend on the physical burden borne by each. For we see that each he-goat here has 20 she-goats, and the proportion is the same for rams and ewes; since they

RASHBAM **13 Yet You have said, "I will deal bountifully with you."** Even though You are not bound to keep this promise—since I am unworthy—please do so anyway, to bring honor upon Your holy name, demonstrating that Your promises are always kept. — Moses said the same: "Let not the Egyptians say, 'It was with evil intent that He delivered them, only to kill them off in the mountains and annihilate them from the face of the earth'" (Exod. 32:12). And indeed "the LORD renounced the punishment He had planned to bring upon His people" (Exod. 32:14). Moses did the same thing a second time, when he imagined the nations saying, "It must be because the LORD was powerless to bring that people into the land He had promised them" (Num. 14:16); this time too the Lord responded by saying, "I pardon, as you have asked" (Num. 14:20).

IBN EZRA **15 200 she-goats.** He sent 10 times as many females for the sheep and goats, four times as many for the cattle, and twice as many for the asses. For he understood the nature of each species. Remember what he did with the "shoots of poplar" (30:37).

KIMHI **13 I will deal bountifully with you.** In contrast to the same English expression in v. 10, the Hebrew uses a double verb form here (which OJPS indicates by adding "surely"). Biblical Hebrew uses this construction—the infinitive absolute followed by a verb of tense—for emphasis. Genesis Rabbah takes advantage of the idiom to interpret each verb differently. Here they take the two verbs to say that He would do good to Jacob both for his own merit and for the merit of his ancestors. **As the sands of the sea.** Repeating the earlier "as the dust of the earth" (28:14). See again our comment to v. 10.

14 After spending the night there. Which he did to await God's answer. But in the meantime he prepared the presents for Esau. Even a righteous man should not count on a miracle to save him.

NAHMANIDES **13 Yet You have said, "I will deal bountifully with you."** Despite his fear that he might have sinned, he nonetheless said, "You have dealt bountifully with me in ways that I did not deserve." Now he adds, "You should therefore certainly be gracious enough to grant me these things that You did promise me. After all, You did not promise them as a reward for my deeds, but only out of Your great kindness." **And make your offspring as the sands of the sea.** Some think Jacob was asking God's compassion for his wives and children so that Esau would not kill them, for he did not know whether the promise "your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth" (28:14) applied to these children or to others. For even if he alone escaped, he might yet have more children. But I do not think this is correct. If that is what he was thinking, why would he describe to "deal bountifully" as to "make your offspring as the sands of the sea"? Moreover, if all his children fell victim to his brother's sword, that would hardly be keeping the promise of "I will protect you wherever you go and will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you" (28:15). In fact, that is what Jacob is hinting at with "I will deal bountifully with you," both here and in v. 10—that all this should fall under the category of "I will be with you" (31:3). But Jacob's repetition of the phrase did indeed result from his fear that he might have sinned. The way of the righteous is to live in constant fear of sin. Jacob was afraid that even after leaving Aram he might have sinned by making a pact with Laban the idolater, or in some other way. "Who can be aware of errors?" (Ps. 19:13).

14 He selected from what was at hand these presents. His wealth was in the form of livestock and, being on the road, that is what he sent. It was not the time or place to send objects of silver and gold or gifts of that kind.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **14 After spending the night there.** Both to demonstrate his confidence in the Holy One, and to await the prophetic vision he anticipated in answer to his prayer; this, however, did not occur until the next night (Abarbanel). **He selected from what was at hand these presents for his brother Esau.** This too would make sense whether Esau intended good or evil (Bekhor Shor). Those who give presents downplay the gift by saying they are merely giving "from what was at hand" (Abarbanel).

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NJPS 16[30 milch camels with their colts; 40 cows and 10 bulls;
20 she-asses and 10 he-asses. 17]These he put in the charge of his servants, drove by drove, and he told his servants, "Go on ahead, and keep a distance between droves." 18He instructed the one in front as follows, "When my brother Esau meets you and asks you, 'Whose man are you? Where are you going? And whose [animals] are these ahead of you?' 19you shall answer, 'Your servant Jacob's; they are a gift sent to my lord Esau; and [Jacob]

OJPS 16thirty milch camels and their colts, forty kine and ten bulls, twenty she-asses and ten foals. 17And he delivered them into the hand of his servants, every drove by itself; and said unto his servants: "Pass over before me, and put a space betwixt drove and drove." 18And he commanded the foremost, saying: "When Esau my brother meeteth thee, and asketh thee, saying: Whose art thou? and whither goest thou? and whose are these before thee? 19then thou shalt say: They are thy servant Jacob's; it is a present sent unto my lord, even unto Esau; and, behold, he also is

16 גְּמַלִּים מֵינִיקוֹת וּבְנֵיהֶם
עֶשְׂרִים׃ שְׁלֹשִׁים פָּרוֹת אַרְבָּעִים וּפָרִים עֲשָׂרָה
אֲתֹנֹת עֶשְׂרִים וַעְיָרִם עֲשָׂרָה׃ 17 וַיִּתֵּן
בְּיַד־עֲבָדָיו עֵדֶר עֵדֶר לְבַדּוֹ וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל־
עֲבָדָיו עִבְרוּ לְפָנַי וְרֶוַח תָּשִׂימוּ בֵּין עֵדֶר
וּבֵין עֵדֶר׃ 18 וַיְצַו אֶת־הָרִאשׁוֹן לֵאמֹר כִּי
יִפְגָּשְׁךָ עֵשָׂו אָחִי וּשְׁאֵלְךָ לֵאמֹר לְמִי־
אַתָּה וְאָנָה תֵלֵךְ וּלְמִי אֵלֶּה לְפָנֶיךָ׃
19 וְאָמַרְתָּ לְעַבְדְּךָ לְיַעֲקֹב מִנְחָה הִוא
שְׁלוּחָה לַאדֹנִי לְעֵשָׂו וְהִנֵּה גַם־הוּא

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why does Jacob tell his servant to give the animals to Esau when Esau asks, "Whose [animals] are these ahead of you?" (v. 18)? If Esau didn't ask, was he supposed to not give him the animals?

RASHI do not work, they engage in much more sex, and each male can impregnate 10 females. (Among animals, once the female is pregnant she no longer accepts the male.) But for the bulls, who do work, there are only four cows each; and for the asses, who travel on long journeys, just two females for each male.

16 30 milch camels with their colts. More precisely: "Milch camels (with their colts), 30" of each sex. Camels travel even farther than asses do, so their proportion is just one female per male. The Hebrew literally says *beneihem* ("their sons"), but a midrash reads the word as *benai'eihem* ("those who build them up"). **[B]** Since camels are somewhat private about sex, the text wished to hint at this rather than say it explicitly.

17 Drove by drove. Each species by itself. **Go on ahead.** As much as a day ahead of me, and I will come along after you. **And keep a distance between droves.** Keep each drove just within eyeshot of the next, to sate the eyes of that wicked man and to stun him with the size of the gift.

18 Whose man are you? Who sent you? **And whose [animals] are these ahead of you?** To whom is this present being sent? "To" (in the Biblical Hebrew of our two phrases) is the equivalent of "belonging to." For example, "The earth is the LORD's" (Ps. 24:1) says more literally that the earth is "to" the Lord.

19 You shall answer, "Your servant Jacob's." Answering the questions in the order they were asked: "Whose man are you?" "I am Your servant Jacob's man." **They are a gift sent to my lord Esau.** Answering the final question, "And whose [animals] are these ahead of you?" (v. 18). As the translation of Onkelos confirms, the ל of the first question means "[belonging] *to* whom," and the ל of the second question means "*for*

[B] See Rashi's comment to 16:2.

RASHBAM **16 Their colts.** This is the straightforward sense of the text. There must, of course, have been some males among the colts.

17 Keep a distance between droves. To keep them as multiple separate droves was a way of showing respect to Esau, making the gift look like a large one.

18 Whose man are you? The Hebrew says merely "Whose are you?" (compare OJPS) but the implication is "Whose servant are you?" They would respond, "Your servant Jacob's."

19 A gift. See my comment to 4:3.

IBN EZRA **16 30 milch camels with their colts.** To show that they were still nursing. Doctors say there is no milk as healthy as camel's milk.

17 Keep a distance between droves. That is, "a space" (OJPS). So too the "relief" of Exod. 8:11 was a space between each of the plagues. For a related verb, see "Saul would *find relief*" (1 Sam. 16:23).

18 And asks you. For a comparable verb form, see "he loves you" (Deut. 15:16).

KIMHI **16 30 milch camels with their colts.** It is not clear why he sent a colt that was still nursing along with each camel.

NAHMANIDES **17 Keep a distance between droves.** To stun that wicked man with the size of the gift. Genesis Rabbah sees an allegory here: Said Jacob, "Master of the Universe! If troubles must come upon my descendants, do not bring them one after the other, but give them some breathing room in between their troubles." Jacob's action thus corresponds to the later situation when the taxes and customs duties that Esau's successors would impose on his descendants would be spaced apart one from another.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **16 30 milch camels with their colts.** Hebrew does not have separate words for male and female camels as it does for the rest of these animals. A more precise translation would be, "Camels: nursing ones and their young males, 30." The 30 asses at the end of the verse demonstrated that the proportion of camels too would be 20 females to 10 males (Bekhor Shor). Giving both males and females would let Esau know that he intended this gift to keep on giving. If Esau kept them separate from his own animals, the Holy One might send blessing upon them, making them a constant reminder of the love between the brothers (Abarbanel).

17 Drove by drove. Keeping each species separate. This would permit them to reproduce, constantly adding to the gift. And this constant addition of good is the definition of "blessing," as this present is called in the Hebrew of 33:11 (Sforno). **Go on ahead.** Not a day ahead, as Rashi thinks; Jacob would follow almost immediately behind the last of the groups (but alone), to catch Esau in a good mood after receiving the presents (Abarbanel). **Keep a distance between droves.** So that the animals do not mix, which would make it impossible to see the blessing cleverly incorporated in the gift (Sforno).

18 Where are you going? I see that you are driving the animals along the road, not pasturing them in the fields (Bekhor Shor). The *vav*s that separate the three questions in this verse—"and" in OJPS—are really to be translated as "or." Jacob was thinking of the kind of questions that Esau might ask (Abarbanel).

19 You shall answer . . . "They are a gift sent to my lord Esau." Notice that they are only supposed to offer the gift if Esau asks them about it. Otherwise they were to pass on by, for his failure to ask would demonstrate that his intentions were hostile. And in fact he did not ask until 33:8, after encountering Jacob himself. So they did not give him this gift at all (Abarbanel). In fact, this first messenger

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NJPS himself is right behind us.'" [20]He gave similar instructions to the second one, and the third, and all the others who followed the droves, namely, "Thus and so shall you say to Esau when you reach him. [21]And you shall add, 'And your servant Jacob himself is right behind us.'" For he reasoned, "If I propitiate him with presents in advance, and then face him, perhaps he will show me favor." [22]And so the gift went on ahead, while he remained in camp that night.

[23]That same night he arose, and taking

OJPS behind us." [20]And he commanded also the second, and the third, and all that followed the droves, saying: "In this manner shall ye speak unto Esau, when ye find him; [21]and ye shall say: Moreover, behold, thy servant Jacob is behind us." For he said: "I will appease him with the present that goeth before me, and afterward I will see his face; peradventure he will accept me." [22]So the present passed over before him; and he himself lodged that night in the camp.

[23]And he rose up that night, and took

אַחֲרֵינוּ׃ [20] וַיְצַו גַּם אֶת־הַשֵּׁנִי גַּם אֶת־
הַשְּׁלִישִׁי גַּם אֶת־כָּל־הַהֹלְכִים אַחֲרֵי
הָעֲדָרִים לֵאמֹר כַּדָּבָר הַזֶּה תְּדַבְּרוּן אֶל־
עֵשָׂו בְּמֹצַאֲכֶם אֹתוֹ׃ [21] וַאֲמַרְתֶּם גַּם הִנֵּה
עַבְדְּךָ יַעֲקֹב אַחֲרֵינוּ כִּי־אָמַר אֲכַפְּרָה פָנָיו
בַּמִּנְחָה הַהֹלֶכֶת לְפָנָי וְאַחֲרֵי־כֵן אֶרְאֶה
פָּנָיו אוּלַי יִשָּׂא פָנָי׃ [22] וַתַּעֲבֹר הַמִּנְחָה
עַל־פָּנָיו וְהוּא לָן בַּלַּיְלָה־הַהוּא בַּמַּחֲנֶה׃
[23] וַיָּקָם | בַּלַּיְלָה הוּא וַיִּקַּח אֶת־שְׁתֵּי נָשָׁיו

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why must we be told that Jacob "gave similar instructions to the second one, and the third, and all the others who followed" (v. 20)? Couldn't the text simply have said, "Jacob instructed his servants"? ✦ Why must each of them say, "And your servant [Jacob] himself is right behind us" (v. 21)? ✦ Why are we not told what Jacob "reasoned" back in v. 14, when he selected the presents? If he actually "said" this (see OJPS) to his servants, that would be extraordinarily strange, not to mention disgraceful.

RASHI whom." **[C] [Jacob] himself is right behind us**. The text says merely "he" (OJPS), but NJPS identifies correctly who "he" is.

21 If I propitiate him. That is, "I will mitigate his anger." ("If" is not in the Hebrew; see OJPS.) Compare (using the same Hebrew verb) "Your covenant with Death shall be *annulled*" (Isa. 28:18); "Evil is coming upon you which you will not know how to *charm away*" (Isa. 47:11). The Hebrew verb is sometimes translated "to expiate," but I think (based on its use in Aramaic, including many occurrences in the Talmud) that with regard to sin or transgression being expiated "from [someone's] presence" (as our phrase more literally says) its essential meaning is really "to cleanse, to remove." Notice that the "gold bowls" of Ezra 1:10—a noun derived from this root—are used by the priests to cleanse their hands, wiping them on the edge of the bowls.

22 Ahead. Literally, "on his face," a less common variant of the literal "to his face," meaning "before him" (OJPS). For other examples of it, see "the people who provoke My anger, who continually, *to My very face*, sacrifice in gardens and burn incense on tiles" (Isa. 65:3); "*Before Me* constantly are sickness and wounds" (Jer. 6:7). But a midrash interprets it literally: the gift showed "on his face"; he was upset that he had to do all this. **[D]**

23 And his eleven children. Where was Dinah? He had locked her in a trunk so that

[C] Not all our texts of Onkelos are the same as Rashi's. **[D]** Alternatively, the midrash is reading "face" metaphorically: "the gift went on ahead *against his face*"—that is, despite his anger.

KIMHI **23 That same night he arose**. The slightly unusual Hebrew syntax actually says, "As for him, he arose at night." That is, he got up at night after sleeping for just a

RASHBAM **21 For he reasoned**. Literally "For he said" (OJPS), but this is indeed Jacob's private thought, not a continuation of the words he is telling the messengers to say. **And your servant [Jacob] himself is right behind us**. This was meant to throw Esau off the trail. For Jacob intended to flee in a different direction during the night and would have done so had he not been prevented by the encounter with the angel.

23 That same night he arose. Intending to flee, which is why he crossed at night. David did the same when he was fleeing

IBN EZRA **20 And all the others who followed**. Five in all. **When you reach him**. Though there is no comparable verb form in the Bible, the unusual vowel can easily be explained by the presence of the guttural א.

21 For he reasoned. Literally "he said" (OJPS), but NJPS has the sense. And both translations correctly understand that this is Moses speaking, not part of what the servants were to tell Esau. **If I propitiate him**. The Hebrew metaphor is of "covering" and hiding the "face," here representing Esau's angry mood. Compare the expression used to tell us that Hannah "was no longer downcast" (1 Sam. 1:18), which says literally that she "no longer had her face."

23 He crossed the ford of the Jabbok. Rather, "the Jabbok ford" over the Jordan. He crossed first, and then he went back and

NAHMANIDES **21 If I propitiate him with presents**. See Rashi's comment. Ibn Ezra too thinks (with NJPS) that this is part of Jacob's thought process. Obviously it makes no sense for the servants to remind Esau of his anger. But I do not see why the text would be telling us this just now. That is what anyone sending such gifts to a powerful person would be thinking. If that is what this is, we should have been told so earlier, perhaps right after v. 19. Really he is saying this to the messengers, as OJPS implies. The point is that he wants them to say "your servant is right behind us" in a respectful, unthreatening way. "He is right behind us, having first sent us with a gift to ransom his life for seeing Your Honor." Once again Jacob is humiliating himself out of fear of Esau: "The king's wrath is a messenger of death, but a wise man can *appease* it" (Prov. 16:14). What this root means in Aramaic is not relevant; this is Hebrew. In Hebrew, this verb is not properly used with "sin" but with the self: "as *expiation* for your *persons*" (Exod. 30:15); "the priest shall make *expiation* before the LORD on behalf of the *person* who erred" (Num. 15:28). Everything goes back to Exod. 30:15, where it is a matter of (literal) redemption.

22 While he remained in camp that night. He did not sleep in his tent, but in the camp with his servants and herdsmen, "accoutered like a man for battle" (Jer. 6:23), in case his brother came during the night and attacked him.

23 That same night he arose, and taking his two wives, his two maidservants, and his eleven children, he crossed the ford of the Jabbok. This verse and the next must have occurred, as sometimes is the case in the Torah, before he divided everything in two

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS was supposed to act as if he did not even know who Esau was, to prevent Esau from realizing that his brother knew he was coming and had sent him this present out of fear (Sforno).

20 Thus and so shall you say to Esau when you reach him. All the groups after the first would not wait to be asked but would "say" boldly to Esau that Jacob was on his way (Abarbanel).

21 If I propitiate him with presents in advance. If Jacob is really explaining to the messengers that "I will appease him with the present" (OJPS), the point would be to placate Esau for not hurrying to meet him first as a younger brother should do (Hizkuni).

23 That same night. The unusual Hebrew phrase occurs also only in 19:33, 30:16, and 1 Sam. 19:10 (Masorah). **Taking his two**

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NJPS his two wives, his two maidservants, and his eleven children, he crossed the ford of the Jabbok. [24]After taking them across the stream, he sent across all his possessions. [25]Jacob was left alone. And a man wrestled with him until the break of

OJPS his two wives, and his two handmaids, and his eleven children, and passed over the ford of the Jabbok. [24]And he took them, and sent them over the stream, and sent over that which he had. [25]And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the

וְאֶת־שְׁתֵּי שִׁפְחֹתָיו וְאֶת־אַחַד עָשָׂר
יְלָדָיו וַיַּעֲבֹר אֵת מַעֲבַר יַבֹּק׃ [24] וַיִּקָּחֵם
וַיַּעֲבִרֵם אֶת־הַנָּחַל וַיַּעֲבֵר אֶת־אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ׃
[25] וַיִּוָּתֵר יַעֲקֹב לְבַדּוֹ וַיֵּאָבֵק אִישׁ עִמּוֹ עַד

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ How are we supposed to understand in what way Jacob first "crossed the ford of the Jabbok" (v. 23), then took his family "across the stream" (v. 24)—after which "he sent across all his possessions"?

RASHI Esau would not lay eyes on her. But Jacob was punished for withholding her from his brother when she might possibly have brought him back to the good. For she fell instead into the hands of Shechem. **The ford of the Jabbok.** Literally "the Jabbok ford," but in this case Jabbok is indeed the name of the river.

24 He sent across. That is, "he transferred," ferrying things across from this side to that. **All his possessions.** More literally "that which he had" (OJPS), but NJPS correctly understands that this refers to the livestock and the movables.

25 Jacob was left alone. He had forgotten a few small items and returned to get them. **And a man wrestled with him.** Menahem identifies the verb as deriving from the word meaning "dust": the man "got himself dusty." The scraping of their feet on the ground raised a cloud of dust. But to me it seems that this must mean the man "wrapped himself" around him as men do when they wrestle, trying to fell their opponents. That is how this root is used in Aramaic. In any case, our Sages explain this "man" as being the prince of Esau. **[E]**

[E] As the word is used in "Now I must go back to fight the prince of Persia. When I go off, the prince of Greece will come in" (Dan. 10:20).

RASHBAM from Absalom: "David and all the troops with him promptly crossed the Jordan, and by daybreak not one was left who had not crossed the Jordan" (2 Sam. 17:22). In fact, David crossed in the same area, for by the time Absalom crossed the Jordan in pursuit (two verses later), "David had reached Mahanaim." **The ford of the Jabbok.** Again, he forded the water so as to flee.

25 Jacob was left alone. He had taken everything he had across; there was nothing left to bring across but himself. And he meant to follow behind them, intending to flee rather than encounter Esau. **And** an angel **wrestled with him.** To keep him from fleeing, so that he would see the fulfillment of the Holy One's promise: Esau would not harm him.

KIMHI little, in order to transfer his camp during the night. **Taking his two wives, his two maidservants, and his eleven children, he crossed the ford of the Jabbok.** He "took" them to the edge of the Jabbok, getting them ready to cross, while he himself went across to check how deep the water was. The "ford" of any river or stream is the place where the water is known to be shallower than elsewhere. Dinah, being so young that she was still with her mother, Leah, is not included in the count here.

24 After taking them across the stream. Having tested the water, he now went back and brought each of them across individually, carrying the ones who needed to be carried and leading by the hand the ones who were capable of crossing in that way, until he had brought them all across.

25 And a man wrestled with him. An angel who interacts with human beings can be called a "man" and in fact does appear to them as such. God sent this angel to strengthen Jacob's courage; having overcome him, he need not fear Esau.

IBN EZRA brought his wives and children across. Then he went back once more, to make sure nothing had been left behind.

25 Jacob was left alone. It is not correct to say that Jacob was trying to run away, abandoning his family and all his possessions. He had already informed Esau he was on his way, and had sent the gift he promised. If he fled now, that would just get Esau angry again, and he would kill the entire camp. Jacob was a smart man—how could anyone think he would do this? **And a man wrestled with him.** Etymologically, the man "had a dustup" with him; their struggle raised dust. **Until the break of dawn.** The Hebrew idiom is literally "until the darkness lifted." But some understand this word to refer not to darkness but to light, the light seen on the clouds before the sun itself has risen; "for one who speaks thus there shall be no *dawn*" (Isa. 8:20).

NAHMANIDES camps. **[D]** We see him bringing his wives and children to the bank of the river and then fording it by himself to make sure the water had not risen.

24 After taking them across the stream. His wives and children, all together. **He sent across all his possessions.** His livestock and his other possessions.

25 Jacob was left alone. See Rashi's comment. But the straightforward explanation must indeed be that the repeated verb in v. 24 (see OJPS) is being used in two different ways (see NJPS). First he personally brought his family across; then he went back and "sent across" his possessions with his servants, leaving him as the last one on that side. **And a man wrestled with him.** See Rashi's comment. Since the Sages apparently had difficulty in pronouncing ח, they often replaced it with א; so our verb may indeed refer to "grappling"; a comparison of Zech. 6:3 with Isa. 63:1 (and perhaps also Ezek. 27:24 with Song 1:10) demonstrates that this interchange did sometimes occur in the Bible as well. But Genesis Rabbah makes mention of the "dust" of Menahem's explanation, which is in fact the correct one.

[D] Others think Nahmanides is saying that the order of the family in this verse is irrelevant to the order in 33:2; Nahmanides generally thinks the Torah *is* written in chronological order unless it explicitly says otherwise. But he may simply be cautioning against a too-literal reading of vv. 23–24.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **wives, his two maidservants, and his eleven children.** Here he puts the women ahead, affording the children a measure of protection; in 31:17, when he is running away from Laban, he put the children ahead of the wives, again protecting them (Hizkuni). **He crossed the ford of the Jabbok.** Some say Jabbok here is just another name for "this Jordan" of v. 11 (Hizkuni).

24 After taking them across the stream. From the Hebrew word, I cannot tell whether this was a stream with actual water or simply a dry wash (Bekhor Shor).

25 Jacob was left alone. The "few small items" our Sages say he forgot is a reference to his "possessions" (v. 24); he had returned to that side to organize their transfer. They were "small" in comparison to his wives and children (Abarbanel). **And a man wrestled with him.** The Hebrew verb is unique, occurring only here (Masorah). Calling this man "the prince of Esau" should not be understood to mean that individuals have angelic princes of this kind. But the prince of Edom was also the prince of Esau, the founder of that nation (Abarbanel).

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NJPS dawn. [26]When he saw that he had not prevailed against him, he wrenched Jacob's hip at its socket, so that the socket of his hip was strained as he wrestled with him. [27]Then he said, "Let me go, for dawn is breaking." But he answered, "I will not let you go, unless you bless me." [28]Said the other, "What is your name?" He replied, "Jacob." [29]Said he, "Your name shall no longer be Jacob, but

עֲלוֹת הַשָּׁחַר׃ 26 וַיַּרְא כִּי לֹא יָכֹל לוֹ וַיִּגַּע
בְּכַף־יְרֵכוֹ וַתֵּקַע כַּף־יֶרֶךְ יַעֲקֹב בְּהֵאָבְקוֹ
עִמּוֹ׃ 27 וַיֹּאמֶר שַׁלְּחֵנִי כִּי עָלָה הַשָּׁחַר
וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא אֲשַׁלֵּחֲךָ כִּי אִם־בֵּרַכְתָּנִי׃
28 וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו מַה־שְּׁמֶךָ וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב׃
29 וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא יַעֲקֹב יֵאָמֵר עוֹד שִׁמְךָ כִּי

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why did the man with whom Jacob was wrestling say to him, "Let me go, for dawn is breaking" (v. 27)? As our Sages ask, what was he, some kind of thief? ✦ Given that he had tried to kill Jacob, and certainly managed to wrench his hip, why would Jacob say, "I will not let you go, unless you bless me"? What blessing would a man use to bless his enemy?

OJPS day. [26]And when he saw that he prevailed not against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh; and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was strained, as he wrestled with him. [27]And he said: "Let me go, for the day breaketh." And he said: "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me." [28]And he said unto him: "What is thy name?" And he said: "Jacob." [29]And he said: "Thy name shall be called no

RASHI **26 He wrenched Jacob's hip at its socket.** That is the "hollow" of his thigh (see OJPS); the socket is shaped like a cup or bowl, which is what the Hebrew more literally means. **So that the socket of his hip was strained.** Being literally "wrenched" out of its place. Compare the more abstract "removal" indicated by this word in "Lest I *turn* from you in disgust" (Jer. 6:8). It is used this way in rabbinic literature also.

27 For dawn is breaking. And when the day arrives I must be on duty to recite songs of praise. **Unless you bless me.** Confirm for me the blessings that my father blessed me with, which Esau is disputing.

29 Your name shall no longer be Jacob. It shall no longer be said that the blessings came to you *be'acob*, in a roundabout, deceptive way, but officially and openly. **But**

KIMHI **26 The socket of his hip was strained.** That is, his groin. The implication (as Jacob understood) was that Esau would not be able to overcome him, but would cause harm to one of his descendants. It was Dinah, who was to be violated by the Canaanite, though Jacob did not perceive this detail; he thought she might fall sick or even die. This may have all occurred in a prophetic dream. The fact that in v. 32 he ends up actually limping may simply have been a sign from God that he should not have doubted all the promises He gave him. But if you like you can say that it really did happen.

27 Let me go. If you are through with me, I will be on my way. (But Jacob was not through with him.) **For dawn is breaking.** You need not fear being left alone in the dark.

28 What is your name? Not that he did not know; he was starting the conversation.

29 Your name shall no longer be Jacob. Angels are authorized to add to their original mission, as did the angel who was sent to save Lot: "Very well, I will grant you this favor too" (19:21). Or perhaps the angel was

RASHBAM **26 When he saw that he had not prevailed against him.** When the angel saw that he had not prevailed against Jacob, who still wanted to cross and flee despite the angel's best efforts.

27 For dawn is breaking. Now that it is daylight you should be on your way. **Unless you bless me.** You must release me healthy and not injured from wrestling with you. — For now that it was light, Jacob realized that this was an angel.

29 You have striven. For an example of this ל״ה verb showing all three root

IBN EZRA **26 When he saw that he had not prevailed against him.** That is, when the angel saw that he, the angel, had not prevailed against Jacob. The Holy One had warned the angel not to harm Jacob other than by wrenching his hip. **He wrenched Jacob's hip at its socket.** NJPS has moved "Jacob" up from the following phrase for clarity (see OJPS). **The socket of his hip was strained.** His hip was dislocated.

29 You have striven with beings divine and human. Rather, "you are of the

NAHMANIDES **26 When he saw that he had not prevailed against him.** His angels are "mighty creatures," but they are "ever obedient to His bidding" (Ps. 103:20); that is why the angel did not prevail against Jacob or manage to injure him severely. He was not permitted to do anything more than wrench his hip. **He wrenched Jacob's hip at its socket.** Genesis Rabbah takes this to imply that he thereby injured all the righteous ones who would descend from Jacob; "this was the Generation of Annihilation." **[E]** The point is that this whole episode portends that there would eventually be one generation of Jacob's descendants over whom Esau's descendants would be able to prevail, so greatly that they would almost be exterminated. This was one particular generation during mishnaic times, the generation of R. Judah b. Bava and his companions. "Said R. Hiyya b. Abba: 'If I were asked to give my life for the sanctification of God's Name, I would do so—as long they killed me right away. But I could not possibly have borne what happened to the Generation of Annihilation.' And what did they do to the Generation of Annihilation? They heated iron pellets white hot, put them in their armpits, and took their lives from them in that way." In other generations they have done the like to us, and worse. We have borne it all and made it through: "Jacob arrived safe" (33:18).

[E] This is a traditional name for those who lived during the reign of the emperor Hadrian, culminating with the Bar Kokhba revolt and its horrible aftermath.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **26 He had not prevailed against him.** Because Jacob cleaved tenaciously to the Holy One in thought and in speech (Sforno). **He wrenched Jacob's hip at its socket.** Trying to trip Jacob and make him fall (Bekhor Shor). The Hebrew verb is a contronym; here it means "to wrench out," while in 31:25 it means "to push in." Note too that Jacob is injured (despite the Holy One's promise to protect him) because he was afraid of Esau. Moses himself was attacked in Exod. 4:24 (despite God's promise in Exod. 3:12 that "I will be with you"), for saying (in Exod. 4:13), "Please, O Lord, make someone else Your agent" because he was afraid of Pharaoh (Hizkuni). Tripping Jacob in this way was a trick he resorted to when he saw that he could not prevail honestly. But Jacob was so strong that even this did not bring him down (Abarbanel). The angel informed him of the future sin of his people's leaders. In his concern, Jacob's cleaving to the Holy One was momentarily interrupted and the angel was able to injure him (Sforno).

27 Let me go, for dawn is breaking. As the Sages say, evil spirits cannot do harm or even appear during the day (Bekhor Shor). Since this all occurred in a dream, it had to end when Jacob woke up, which he customarily did at dawn (Gersonides). The implications for Jacob's descendants are that Edom will only be able to harm them until "dawn is breaking," when the darkness of exile disappears at the time of the future redemption (Abarbanel). **I will not let you go, unless you bless me.** You came to harm me, so you must agree to make peace with me, and admit that I beat you (Bekhor Shor).

29 Your name shall no longer be Jacob. At the end of days, when you continue to exist after the other nations perish, your name

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NJPS Israel, for you have striven with beings divine and human, and have prevailed." [30]Jacob asked, "Pray tell me your name." But he said, "You must not ask my name!" And he took leave of him there. [31]So Jacob named the place Peniel, meaning, "I have seen a divine being face to

אִם־יִשְׂרָאֵל כִּי־שָׂרִיתָ עִם־אֱלֹהִים וְעִם־
אֲנָשִׁים וַתּוּכָל׃ [30] וַיִּשְׁאַל יַעֲקֹב וַיֹּאמֶר
הַגֶּידָה־נָּא שְׁמֶךָ וַיֹּאמֶר לָמָּה זֶּה תִּשְׁאַל
לִשְׁמִי וַיְבָרֶךְ אֹתוֹ שָׁם׃ [31] וַיִּקְרָא יַעֲקֹב
שֵׁם הַמָּקוֹם פְּנִיאֵל כִּי־רָאִיתִי אֱלֹהִים

OJPS more Jacob, but Israel; for thou hast striven with God and with men, and hast prevailed." [30]And Jacob asked him, and said: "Tell me, I pray thee, thy name." And he said: "Wherefore is it that thou dost ask after my name?" And he blessed him there. [31]And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: "for I have seen God face to

RASHI **Israel.** For eventually the Holy One will appear to you at Bethel and change your name. He will bless you there, and I will be there and will confirm these blessings for you. — And indeed we find that "He strove with an angel and prevailed—the other had to weep and implore him" (Hosea 12:5). And what did the angel implore him about? That "at Bethel [Jacob] would meet him, there to commune with him" (as Hosea 12:5 continues). "Wait for me until the Holy One speaks with us there." But Jacob did not want to wait; see the next verse. **With beings divine and human.** The human ones were Esau and Laban. **And have prevailed.** Over them.

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why did Jacob need to know the man's name (v. 30)? ✦ Why did the man refuse to tell him? ✦ When the man asked why Jacob wanted to know his name (it is a question; see OJPS), why didn't Jacob reply, "Because you asked *my* name—and I told you!"? ✦ Since he has had many divine encounters, starting with the vision of the stairway, what possesses Jacob this time to name the place Peniel, because "I have seen a divine being face to face, yet my life has been preserved" (v. 31)? ✦ Did this fight occur in a prophetic vision, or in waking life? If it really happened, how did Jacob know this man was an angel? But if it was a dream, why did he wake up with a limp?

30 You must not ask my name! Rather, "why are you asking my name?" (compare OJPS). "We do not have permanent names; our names are constantly changing to match the particular mission we are being commanded to fulfill." **And he took leave of him there.** Rather, "he blessed him there" (OJPS). As I said in my comment to the previous verse, Jacob was not willing to wait until he got to Bethel to be blessed. The angel was forced to confirm his blessings right then and there, though the angel "implored him" to wait.

KIMHI saying this to Jacob in God's name. **But Israel.** In Genesis Rabbah the Sages disagree about which of the two would now be his primary name.

30 Pray tell me your name. Angels are named according to their missions; Jacob wanted to know what this angel was assigned to do. When Samson's father asked an angel this same question, he replied, "It is unknowable"—even I do not know what it is going to be changed to next. **And he took leave of him there.** Rather, "And he blessed him there" (OJPS). He blessed him further, in addition to the blessing conveyed by naming him Israel. And he blessed him "there" in addition to the blessing he would be given later at Bethel.

31 I have seen a divine being face to face. Following the explanation that the angel was a divine being that actually took on flesh, Jacob is saying that he had never before had such an encounter in waking life. But according to the dream explanation, Jacob is remarking on how profoundly realistic this vision was. **Yet my life has been preserved.** Which he might well say even if it was a dream, being such a realistic one.

NAHMANIDES **30 You must not ask my name!** Rather, "Why are you asking about my name?" (compare OJPS). "There is no point in your knowing it. There is no strength or power that does not come from the Holy One himself. If you called me, I would not respond, nor would I deliver you from your distress. But I will bless you now, for so I have been commanded." **And he took leave of him there.** Rather, "and he blessed him there" (OJPS), as he had been commanded to do. But the text does not say what blessing he gave him. The explanation given by the Sages is a plausible one—that he was forced to confirm all the blessings right there. **[F]** Jacob did not want to have to wait until he got to Bethel.

[F] See Rashi's comment.

RASHBAM letters, see "Grown to manhood, he *strove* with a divine being" (Hosea 12:4). But the verb in the following verse, "He *strove* with an angel" (Hosea 12:5) is from a different root; it is a hollow verb. As for Jacob's being lamed in this fight, that is because he was trying to flee despite the Holy One's promise. We find that anyone who defies God's will by going in a different direction, or by refusing to go at all, is similarly punished. Moses said, "Please, O Lord, make someone else Your agent" (Exod. 4:13), and "the LORD became angry with Moses" (Exod. 4:14). The Sages say that the Lord's anger was not actually displayed on this occasion, but notice what He goes on to say: "There is your brother Aaron the Levite"—at the moment, you are the priest and he is the Levite, but now I am going to make him the priest and you the Levite." Even in a straightforward reading of the text, God's anger is in fact displayed: "At a night encampment on the way, the LORD encountered him and sought to kill him" (Exod. 4:24). Jonah, of course, was swallowed by "a huge fish" (Jon. 2:1); when Balaam went with the Moabite dignitaries, "God was incensed at his going" (Num. 22:22) and the ass "pressed herself against the wall and squeezed Balaam's foot" (Num. 22:25) and "he went off lame" (as Num. 23:3 should be translated).

IBN EZRA same princely rank" as beings divine and human. The verb has a different meaning here than in "Abimelech held sway over Israel for three years" (Judg. 9:22); the difference is "over" in that verse and "with" in ours. Jacob is "of princely rank" along with princes divine and human.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS shall no longer be Jacob (Sforno). **You have striven with beings divine.** Me. And you beat me (Bekhor Shor). **And human.** As I appeared to you (Abarbanel). With these two categories, compare Isa. 24:21, "In that day, the LORD will punish the host of heaven in heaven and the kings of the earth on earth" (Sforno).

30 Pray tell me your name. Which will inform me of your form and the action that results from it. I can then comprehend why you arose as an adversary to me, repent of my sin, and pray (Sforno). **You must not ask my name!** The winner wants his name known, but the loser does not; people will just say, "What a loser!" But of course angels also do not want people to be able to conjure them up at will (Bekhor Shor). Rather, "Why do you ask my name?—There is no need." When strangers who meet part on friendly terms, they exchange names in case they meet again; but this was not going to happen (Hizkuni). Ordinarily the loser of such a match could expect to be summoned at any moment to serve the winner; but this does not apply to angels (Abarbanel). **And he took leave of him there.** First making peace with him (Bekhor Shor).

31 I have seen a divine being face to face. The only other occurrences of "face to face" are in Exod. 33:11, Deut. 34:10, Judg. 6:22,

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NJPS face, yet my life has been preserved." 32The sun rose upon him as he passed Penuel, limping on his hip. 33That is why the children of Israel to this day do not eat the thigh muscle that is on the socket of the hip, since Jacob's hip socket was wrenched at the thigh muscle.

OJPS face, and my life is preserved." 32And the sun rose upon him as he passed over Peniel, and he limped upon his thigh. 33Therefore the children of Israel eat not the sinew of the thigh-vein which is upon the hollow of the thigh, unto this day; because he touched the hollow of Jacob's thigh, even in the sinew of the thigh-vein.

פָּנִים אֶל־פָּנִים וַתִּנָּצֵל נַפְשִׁי׃ 32 וַיִּזְרַח־
לוֹ הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ כַּאֲשֶׁר עָבַר אֶת־פְּנוּאֵל וְהוּא
צֹלֵעַ עַל־יְרֵכוֹ׃ 33 עַל־כֵּן לֹא־יֹאכְלוּ בְנֵי־
יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־גִּיד הַנָּשֶׁה אֲשֶׁר עַל־כַּף הַיָּרֵךְ
עַד הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה כִּי נָגַע בְּכַף־יֶרֶךְ יַעֲקֹב
בְּגִיד הַנָּשֶׁה׃

RASHI **32 The sun rose upon him.** To say that the sun rose "upon him" is quite natural, just as it is normal for people to say, "When we got to Such-and-Such, dawn broke *upon us*"—as if for them alone. It is idiomatic. That is the straightforward sense. But the midrashic perspective is that it rose "upon" Jacob or, more literally, "for" Jacob's own needs, in this case to heal his limp, as in "But for you who revere My name a sun of victory shall rise to bring healing" (Mal. 3:20). The sun made up for the hours it missed by setting early when he left Beer-sheba **[F]** by rising early for him now. **Limping on his hip.** That is, he was already limping when the sun rose. The Hebrew leaves this somewhat unclear; see OJPS.

33 The thigh muscle. In Hebrew, "the sinew that pops out," as this one does from its place; compare what Joseph says in 41:51, "God *has made me forget completely* my hardship and my parental home," that is, He has made them "pop completely out" of my mind.

[F] See Rashi's comment to "for the sun had set" (28:11).

KIMHI **32 As he passed Penuel.** This is "Peniel" of v. 31; the interchange of *i* and *u* is a common one. **Limping on his hip.** Which he noticed only now.

33 That is why the children of Israel to this day do not eat the thigh muscle. Jacob's sons imposed this restriction on themselves and their descendants in honor of their father, just as Jonadab son of Rechab commanded his family, "You shall never drink wine, either you or your children" (Jer. 35:6). But Moses wrote this into the Torah on God's instructions.

NAHMANIDES **32 Limping on his hip.** **[G]**

[G] See Nahmanides' comment to 18:1.

RASHBAM **32 The sun rose upon him as he passed Penuel, limping on his hip.** It was not that he started limping then, but that once the sun rose people could see that he was limping. Compare "When morning came, there was Leah!" (29:25). It was Leah all night long, but this only became apparent when it grew light.

33 That is why the children of Israel to this day do not eat the thigh muscle. In memory of Jacob's courage and of the miracle of God's saving his life.

IBN EZRA **32 The sun rose upon him.** Many people ask, "How could the sun rise 'upon Jacob'? Doesn't the sun rise upon the entire earth at the same time?" In fact, no. This question is a waste of breath. Sunrise takes place at a different hour in different places. The difference between Jerusalem and Lucca (where I am writing this commentary) is an hour and 20 minutes—12 degrees of longitude. This is quite clear and admits of no doubt. **Limping on his hip.** That is, he was favoring one side; this is what prompted the tradition explained in the next verse.

33 The thigh muscle. We know what this is because we have a tradition from our ancestors; no one doubts it except for the brainless people who associate *nasheh* with *nashim* ("women") and think this "muscle" is the male member. As for understanding how this angel who appeared to Jacob could have a body, that will become clear to you (if the Holy One opens your eyes) with the verse "since My Name is in him" (Exod. 23:21). **[B]**

[B] In a long essay not included in this edition that is appended to his comment on Exod. 23:20, Ibn Ezra says that the angels are reflections of God just as the light of the moon is a reflection of the light of the sun.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS and Ezek. 20:35 (Masorah). The implication of the idiom, as when Amaziah sent the message "let us see each other's face" to Jehoash in 2 Kings 14:8, is "I have *confronted* a divine being." Just seeing a divine being was nothing new for Jacob, but this is the only place where he fought one (Bekhor Shor).

32 The sun rose upon him as he passed Penuel, limping on his hip. Because of the limp, he could not travel fast and had gotten no farther than Penuel (Bekhor Shor). From the vernal equinox to the summer solstice, the sun rises about 36 parts (two minutes) earlier each day and sets 36 parts later; you can remember that because "upon him" is לו, which has the numerical value of 36 (Hizkuni). The sun can most certainly rise at different times in different places; this is obvious to anyone who has the slightest acquaintance with astronomy. If you are wondering how he could be limping from a dream, you must realize that people do move in their dreams to match what is happening to them; alternatively, some movement during the night might have wrenched his hip, which could cause him to have the dream he had (Gersonides). Gersonides' explanation is internally contradictory. "Jacob was left alone" (v. 25) tells us quite clearly that this was not a dream; if it was, what would it matter whether he was alone or not? This was a prophetic, waking vision, as I explained in my comment to Abraham's vision in 18:2. As for the limp, Jacob could actually not move a muscle after his hip was wrenched out of its socket, until (to paraphrase Mal. 3:20) the "sun of victory rose to bring healing" (Abarbanel).

33 That is why the children of Israel to this day do not eat the thigh muscle that is on the socket of the hip. To commemorate his heroism (Bekhor Shor). This is a punishment for Jacob's sons leaving him alone and not helping him when he needed them. R. Judah was asked why it says "the children of Israel" here (which they were not called until Sinai) and not "the children of Jacob." He explained, "This commandment was given at Sinai, but it is written here in the Torah so they would know the reason for the prohibition" (Hizkuni). To make this story known; for belief in prophecy preceded the giving of the Torah. But the commandment itself was given at Sinai. The Torah was not given twice (Gersonides). Turning the harm done to Jacob's hip into a relatively inconsiderable harm to us (Sforno).

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NJPS 33 Looking up, Jacob saw Esau coming, accompanied by four hundred men. He divided the children among Leah, Rachel, and the two maids, [2]putting the maids and their children first, Leah and her children next, and Rachel and Joseph last. [3]He himself went on ahead and bowed low to the ground seven times until he was near his brother. [4]Esau ran to greet him. He embraced him and, falling on his neck, he kissed him; and they wept. [5]Looking about, he saw the women and the children. "Who," he asked, "are these with you?" He answered, "The children with whom God has favored your servant." [6]Then the maids, with their children, came forward and bowed low; [7]next Leah, with her children, came forward and bowed low; and last, Joseph and Rachel came forward and

OJPS 33 And Jacob lifted up his eyes and looked, and, behold, Esau came, and with him four hundred men. And he divided the children unto Leah, and unto Rachel, and unto the two handmaids. [2]And he put the handmaids and their children foremost, and Leah and her children after, and Rachel and Joseph hindermost. [3]And he himself passed over before them, and bowed himself to the ground seven times, until he came near to his brother. [4]And Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck, and kissed him; and they wept. [5]And he lifted up his eyes, and saw the women and the children; and said: "Who are these with thee?" And he said: "The children whom God hath graciously given thy servant." [6]Then the handmaids came near, they and their children, and they bowed down. [7]And Leah also and her children came near, and bowed down; and after came Joseph near and Rachel, and they

לג וַיִּשָּׂא יַעֲקֹב עֵינָיו וַיַּרְא וְהִנֵּה עֵשָׂו
בָּא וְעִמּוֹ אַרְבַּע מֵאוֹת אִישׁ וַיַּחַץ אֶת־
הַיְלָדִים עַל־לֵאָה וְעַל־רָחֵל וְעַל שְׁתֵּי
הַשְּׁפָחוֹת׃ 2 וַיָּשֶׂם אֶת־הַשְּׁפָחוֹת וְאֶת־
יַלְדֵיהֶן רִאשֹׁנָה וְאֶת־לֵאָה וְיַלְדֶּיהָ
אַחֲרֹנִים וְאֶת־רָחֵל וְאֶת־יוֹסֵף אַחֲרֹנִים׃
3 וְהוּא עָבַר לִפְנֵיהֶם וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ אַרְצָה שֶׁבַע
פְּעָמִים עַד־גִּשְׁתּוֹ עַד־אָחִיו׃ 4 וַיָּרָץ עֵשָׂו
לִקְרָאתוֹ וַיְחַבְּקֵהוּ* וַיִּפֹּל עַל־צַוָּארָו וַיִּשָּׁקֵהוּ
וַיִּבְכּוּ׃ 5 וַיִּשָּׂא אֶת־עֵינָיו
וַיַּרְא אֶת־הַנָּשִׁים וְאֶת־הַיְלָדִים וַיֹּאמֶר
מִי־אֵלֶּה לָךְ וַיֹּאמֶר הַיְלָדִים אֲשֶׁר־חָנַן
אֱלֹהִים אֶת־עַבְדֶּךָ׃ 6 וַתִּגַּשְׁן הַשְּׁפָחוֹת
הֵנָּה וְיַלְדֵיהֶן וַתִּשְׁתַּחֲוֶיןָ׃ 7 וַתִּגַּשׁ גַּם־
לֵאָה וִילָדֶיהָ וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲווּ וְאַחַר נִגַּשׁ יוֹסֵף

* 4. נקוד על ו׳ י׳ ש׳ ק׳ ה׳ ו׳

RASHI **33:2 Leah and her children next.** More precisely, "after"—the further back, the more beloved.

3 He himself went on ahead. Thinking, "If that evil man wants to fight, let him fight me first."

4 He embraced him. His better feelings took over when he saw Jacob bowing to him over and over again. **He kissed him.** The letters of this word in the Hebrew text have dots over them. There is a dispute about this in the Sifrei; some take the dots to mean that Esau did not kiss him wholeheartedly. Said R. Simeon b. Yohai: It is a known fact that "Esau hates Jacob," but at that moment he was overcome with feeling and did indeed kiss him with all his heart.

5 Who are these with you? Rather, who are they "to" you? In what way are they "yours"? **[G]**

7 Joseph and Rachel came forward. With all the others, the mother came first and then the children, but here Joseph came first. He thought, "My mother is beautiful—what if

[G] Are they your sons or your slaves?

KIMHI **33:3 He himself went on ahead.** "As a father has compassion for his children" (Ps. 103:13). **And bowed low to the ground seven times.** As Genesis Rabbah notes, "Seven times the righteous man falls and gets up" (Prov. 24:16).

4 Esau ran to greet him. Seeing how he had abased himself, Esau forgave everything he had done and was filled with compassion for him.

7 Joseph and Rachel came forward. Rachel held Joseph in front of her, in her arms, out of her great compassion for him.

NAHMANIDES **33:5 Who . . . are these with you?** He was asking about both the women and the children. **The children with whom God has favored your servant.** As is proper, he answered only about the children; he did not want to speak about the women but left Esau to realize that they were the children's mothers.

RASHBAM **33:7 Joseph and Rachel came forward.** The straightforward explanation for Joseph being mentioned first is that the man is usually mentioned first in

IBN EZRA **33:2 And Rachel and Joseph last.** Hoping they would escape, for he loved them.

4 He kissed him. The midrash about the dots over this word is good enough for those "just taken away from the breast" (Isa. 28:9). **[C]** But the straightforward sense is that Esau had no thought of doing evil to his brother. **And they wept.** This is the proof. Joseph and his brother did the same. **[D]**

5 Who are these with you? The translations may be correct, or the question may have been "who are these—yours?" **Favored.** "Favored" means "freely given." Compare Judg. 21:22, where "favoring" them means giving generously to them. The word *ḥinnam* ("free, for no reason") comes from this same root. **[E]**

6 And bowed low. The feminine plural verb shows that the maids bowed, but not the children. The lowly always stand on their pride; free men humble themselves.

[C] Ibn Ezra seems to be referring to the midrash that Esau did not kiss him but bit him. **[D]** See 45:14. **[E]** Our texts of this last sentence seem confused; this is a reasonable guess at the original comment.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **33:1 He divided the children among Leah, Rachel, and the two maids.** Telling each one to take her children and flee with them if necessary (Bekhor Shor). After the vision of the previous night, he had lost his fear that Esau would harm him. But he did not want to put all the children together lest the evil eye have power over them (Abarbanel).

3 He himself went on ahead. He wanted to be able to introduce his wives and children as they came forward (Abarbanel).

5 Who are these with you? Esau assumed that some of them were wives and children and others were members of the wives' extended families (Abarbanel). **The children with whom God has favored your servant.** Jacob was ashamed to admit that all four women were his wives; Esau would have thought, "Mr. Righteous has four wives? Even I only have three!" As it was, Esau assumed that some of the women were nursemaids (Abarbanel).

6 Then the maids, with their children, came forward and bowed low. Ibn Parhon says in his *Lexicon*, "The verb is feminine; the maids bowed but, unlike the sons of Leah and Rachel, the children did not." He explains that they thought their mothers were bowing because of their slave status. But hadn't they seen their father Jacob bowing seven times? What I say is this: when a verb has a compound subject, if the first subject is feminine then the verb is feminine and when it is masculine the verb is masculine, except that when the feminine comes first the verb sometimes switches to follow the second, masculine, form (Bekhor Shor).

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NJPS bowed low; [8]And he asked, "What do you mean by all this company which I have met?" He answered, "To gain my lord's favor." [9]Esau said, "I have enough, my brother; let what you have remain yours." [10]But Jacob said, "No, I pray you; if you would do me this favor, accept from me this gift; for to see your face is like seeing the face of God, and

וְרָחֵל וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ׃ 8 וַיֹּאמֶר מִי לְךָ כָּל־ הַמַּחֲנֶה הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר פָּגָשְׁתִּי וַיֹּאמֶר לִמְצֹא־ חֵן בְּעֵינֵי אֲדֹנִי׃ 9 וַיֹּאמֶר עֵשָׂו יֶשׁ־לִי רָב אָחִי יְהִי לְךָ אֲשֶׁר־לָךְ׃ 10 וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב אַל־נָא אִם־נָא מָצָאתִי חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ וְלָקַחְתָּ מִנְחָתִי מִיָּדִי כִּי עַל־כֵּן רָאִיתִי פָנֶיךָ כִּרְאֹת

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Once Jacob has told Esau, "Accept from me this gift" (v. 10), why must he repeat, "Please accept my present" (v. 11)?

RASHI this wicked man casts his eyes on her? I will stand in front and prevent him from looking at her." This is the moment when Joseph earned the blessing given him in 49:22. **[H]**

8 What do you mean by all this company which I have met? That is, "Who are they to you? How did you get all this?" The straightforward sense of the text is that Esau is asking about the people who brought him the gifts. But a midrash notes that Esau literally calls them "all this *camp*" (OJPS), and understands that Esau encountered some band of angels who were pushing him and his men around. They asked his men, "To whom do you belong?" They replied, "To Esau." The angels said, "Smite them!" They cried, "Leave us alone! He is Isaac's son!" The angels paid no attention. "He is Abraham's grandson!" They still paid no attention. "He is Jacob's brother!" The angels said, "Oh! Then you are on our side."

9 Let what you have remain yours. Thus yielding to him on the question of the blessings.

10 No, I pray you. No, I pray you, do not say so. **If you would do me this favor, accept from me this gift; for to see your face is like seeing the face of God.** "It is right and proper for you to accept this gift from me upon my seeing your face, which I consider the same as seeing the face of an angel"—which is what *elohim* really means here—"and indeed I have seen your guardian angel, your 'prince.' Moreover, you have been gracious enough to forgive my offense." Now, why would Jacob talk about seeing the angel? To make Esau frightened of him: "He has seen angels! Now there is no way I can overcome him." **And you have received me favorably.** You have agreed to be reconciled with me. — The verb means "to want" in later Hebrew, but in the Bible it always means "to find acceptable, to achieve reconciliation." Compare "it will not be *accepted* in your favor" (Lev. 22:20); "The lips of the righteous know what is *pleasing*" (Prov. 10:32), that is, they know how to placate others and reconcile with them.

[H] Understanding "by a spring" there more literally as "against the eye" of Esau.

OJPS bowed down. [8]And he said: "What meanest thou by all this camp which I met?" And he said: "To find favor in the sight of my lord." [9]And Esau said: "I have enough; my brother, let that which thou hast be thine." [10]And Jacob said: "Nay, I pray thee, if now I have found favor in thy sight, then receive my present at my hand; forasmuch as I have seen thy face, as one seeth the face of God, and thou

RASHBAM such expressions. V. 2 is the exception that proves the rule. After mentioning "Leah and her children next" the text matches that format by saying "Rachel and Joseph last."

8 What do you mean by all this company which I have met? By "this camp which I met" (OJPS), Esau meant "the droves that you sent."

IBN EZRA **8 What do you mean.** The text literally says "who," not "what." Esau was asking, "To *whom* did you send all this?" or "*Who* was in your thoughts?" He cannot be asking, "Who are all these animals?" because "who" always refers only to human beings.

10 No, I pray you. Do not say so. (And see my comment to 19:18.) **Like seeing the face of God.** Rather, "of an angel." Most of the commentators do indeed say that the angel came to Jacob to give him the confidence not to fear his brother; after all, if an angel himself could not overcome him, how could a human being?

KIMHI **9 I have enough, my brother; let what you have remain yours.** R. Eleazar says in Genesis Rabbah: A divorce decree does not take effect unless it is signed. Esau was signing off on the blessing that Isaac gave to Jacob.

10 Accept from me this gift; for to see your face is like seeing the face of God. And I knew I could give it to you with true generosity. — The comparison is, of course, somewhat exaggerated, as when the woman tells King David, "My lord is as wise as an angel of God" (2 Sam. 14:20).

NAHMANIDES **8 What do you mean by all this company which I have met?** Jacob's servants did as they had been told, but Esau did not want to accept it from them. Or perhaps, out of haughtiness and arrogance, he had not spoken with them at all and therefore not asked this question of them; they would have been afraid to make the first move. But now he asked, assuming that they were Jacob's from what the original messengers had said. Or perhaps those sent with the animals had been talking about them in Esau's camp, or there may simply not have been anyone else on that road to whom they could belong. The original Hebrew question is literally "who for you?" essentially asking "To whom are you sending all this?" Whom do you consider so great that you send him all this? **He answered, "To gain my lord's favor."** You are the lord who is that great in my eyes.

10 For to see your face is like seeing the face of God. Accept my gift at once, as soon as I have seen your face, which for me is like seeing the face of God. **And you have received me favorably.** Rather, "if only you would receive me favorably," as God accepts the offerings and sacrifices of those who fear Him. "Favorably" here refers to acceptability: "that it may be *acceptable* in his behalf" (Lev. 1:4);

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **8 What do you mean?** The Hebrew phrase occurs also only in 19:12 and Isa. 22:16 (Masorah). **What do you mean by all this company which I have met?** One who gives a gift can expect the giver to reciprocate in some way—but no one could possibly reciprocate for a gift this enormous. Or perhaps Esau was simply expressing his amazement at the size of the gift (Gersonides). Is this a gift of tribute to me or are you trying to be charitable? (Sforno).

9 I have enough, my brother. It is not the adjective *rav* ("enough") but the noun ("master"). Esau was in a good mood and was joking, thinking of all that had gone on between them: "I have a master—my brother. How could I take a present like this from him?" (Abarbanel). I do not need charity (Sforno). **My brother, let what you have remain yours.** Note that "my brother" goes with both phrases of the verse. "You are my brother and do not need to pay tribute to me" (Sforno).

10 Accept from me this gift; for to see your face is like seeing the face of God. To whom one also brings an "offering," as the Hebrew word might be translated (Bekhor Shor). Even though you would not accept the gift from my servants, accept it from me. I am giving

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NJPS you have received me favorably. [11]Please accept my present which has been brought to you, for God has favored me and I have plenty." And when he urged him, he accepted.

[12]And [Esau] said, "Let us start on our journey, and I will proceed at your pace." [13]But he said to him, "My lord knows that the children are frail and that the flocks and herds, which are nursing, are a care to me; if they are driven hard a single day, all the flocks will die. [14]Let my lord go on ahead of his servant, while I travel slowly, at the pace of

OJPS wast pleased with me. [11]Take, I pray thee, my gift that is brought to thee; because God hath dealt graciously with me, and because I have enough." And he urged him, and he took it.

[12]And he said: "Let us take our journey, and let us go, and I will go before thee." [13]And he said unto him: "My lord knoweth that the children are tender, and that the flocks and herds giving suck are a care to me; and if they overdrive them one day, all the flocks will die. [14]Let my lord, I pray thee, pass over before his servant; and I will journey on

פְּנֵי אֱלֹהִים וַתִּרְצֵנִי׃ [11] קַח־נָא אֶת־
בִּרְכָתִי אֲשֶׁר הֻבָאת לָךְ כִּי־חַנַּנִי אֱלֹהִים
וְכִי יֶשׁ־לִי־כֹל וַיִּפְצַר־בּוֹ וַיִּקָּח׃
[12] וַיֹּאמֶר נִסְעָה וְנֵלֵכָה וְאֵלְכָה לְנֶגְדֶּךָ׃
[13] וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו אֲדֹנִי יֹדֵעַ כִּי־הַיְלָדִים
רַכִּים וְהַצֹּאן וְהַבָּקָר עָלוֹת עָלָי וּדְפָקוּם
יוֹם אֶחָד וָמֵתוּ כָּל־הַצֹּאן׃ [14] יַעֲבָר־נָא
אֲדֹנִי לִפְנֵי עַבְדּוֹ וַאֲנִי אֶתְנַהֲלָה לְאִטִּי

RASHI **11 Please accept my present.** Literally, "my blessing." But this is a special kind of blessing, one that is used for greeting and offering good wishes. Compare "Jacob *bade* Pharaoh *farewell*" (47:10); "Toi sent his son Joram to King David to greet him and to *congratulate* him on his military victory" (2 Sam. 8:10); "*Make your peace* with me and come out to me" (2 Kings 18:31). So "my blessing" here is something akin to our *mon salut*. **Which has been brought to you.** You did not have to take any trouble to get it; I was the one who toiled to make sure it reached you. **For God has favored me.** The first נ is doubled with a *dagesh*, indicating the two נs of the root חנן; the second נ (in reality, the third) serves to connect the suffix to the verb. **I have plenty.** Literally, "I have all," meaning "all I need." Contrast Esau's boast in v. 9 (despite OJPS, the Hebrew words are not the same): "I have much," meaning "much more than I need."

12 Let us start. Really it is a lengthened imperative: "Start!—and let's go." The נ is the first root letter of the verb. **I will proceed at your pace.** More literally, "corresponding to you"; NJPS understands the sense.

13 The flocks and herds, which are nursing, are a care to me. The translations are (correctly) interpretive; the Hebrew says idiomatically "the flocks and herds are nursing on me [and I therefore must move them along slowly]." The Hebrew verb refers to the mothers who are nursing their young; compare the "two *milch* cows" of 1 Sam. 6:10 ("milch" in 32:16 is a different Hebrew word). A word from the same root can refer to the "sucklings" themselves; see "*infant* or graybeard" (Isa. 65:20) and "*babes* and sucklings" (Lam. 2:11). **If they are driven hard a single day.** That is, "if they hit them" to make them run at a trot. The Hebrew verb literally means "to knock," as in "Hark, my beloved *knocks*!" (Song 5:2).

14 Let my lord go on ahead. Do not delay your own journey unnecessarily. Go as far on your way as you need to, even if you end up quite far from us. **While I travel.** The ה at

RASHBAM **14 At the pace of.** Literally, "at the foot of"—but that is an idiomatic way of saying "for the sake of." **[A]**

[A] Rashbam does not comment on the phrase here but explains it this way in his comment to 30:30.

IBN EZRA **12 Let us start on our journey.** Some take the Hebrew verb as a lengthened imperative: "Start on the journey!" (compare "Send the boy" of 43:8). But since the second of the verbs that NJPS has combined into this phrase is clearly a cohortative ("let us go," OJPS), the first verb most likely is as well; for the form, compare "*We set out* for Jerusalem" (Ezra 8:31). **I will proceed.** This phrase lends itself to either interpretation.

13 The children are frail. The biggest of them is only 12 years and a few days old. **Nursing.** The same word is used for "the mother sheep" of Isa. 40:11. The reference is to females whom the males have "mounted" (which is the source of this word in Hebrew). **Are a care to me.** Literally, they are "on me," that is, it is "on me" to make sure no harm comes to them. **If they are driven hard.** Literally, "if they [the drovers] overdrive them" (OJPS).

14 While I travel. The ה at the end of the verb implies "while I travel *with them*." **Slowly.** The י at the end of this word, if not

KIMHI **14 Until I come to my lord in Seir.** As we noted in our comment to 32:4, Esau was living there already even though he had not yet settled his family there. According to

NAHMANIDES "May he be the *favorite* of his brothers" (Deut. 33:24); "Their burnt offerings and sacrifices shall be *welcome* on My altar" (Isa. 56:7); "for You *favored* them" (Ps. 44:4); "Your servants *take delight* in its stones, and cherish its dust" (Ps. 102:15). All these occurrences are about desiring something and even delighting in it. As for Rashi's comment, I have already pointed out in my comment to 32:21 that it would not have been a good idea for Jacob to mention what he had done wrong.

11 Please accept my present. Literally, my "blessing"; but the word can mean a gift, as it does (e.g.) in "please accept a *gift* from your servant" (2 Kings 5:15). The word is used for a gift that one sends of one's own free will. The implication is that one is sharing the blessing that one has received from the Holy One: "Furnish him out of the flock, threshing floor, and vat, with which the LORD your God has *blessed* you" (Deut. 15:14). Here too, Jacob had simply selected the gift "from what was at hand" (32:14). The "gift" that one must present to the king on a regular basis is not *bracha* but *mas*—tribute.

13 All the flocks will die. He is tempering his words. He really meant that the children would die, but he did not want to say that. Nor did he want to say simply, "They will die" (meaning the flocks and the herds), because that might be understood to include the children. And he did not want to answer at enough length to specify all the different groups of animals. Or he may actually have meant that only the sheep and goats (being smaller) would die, for the larger animals would be harmed but would not die (and the children would get tired and cranky and not want to travel any more).

14 Until I come to my lord in Seir. Jacob might indeed have returned home via Seir. Esau's suggestion at the end of v. 12 could then

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS it to you for my own sake and not because I imagine you are in need of anything. — It is like God's command in Exod. 23:15 that "none shall appear before Me empty-handed" (Abarbanel).

11 My present. This combination occurs also only in 27:36 and Lev. 25:21 (Masorah).

12 Let us start. The only other example of the form (but there with ו) is in Ezra 8:31 (Masorah).

13 The flocks and herds, which are nursing, are a care to me. The Hebrew *alot alai* was partly chosen for stylistic reasons (Bekhor Shor).

14 Until I come to my lord in Seir. Really "in Seir" goes with the first phrase in the verse; Jacob is saying that he is on his way to

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NJPS the cattle before me and at the pace of the children, until I come to my lord in Seir."

15Then Esau said, "Let me assign to you some of the men who are with me." But he said, "Oh no, my lord is too kind to me!" 16So Esau started back that day on his way to Seir. 17But Jacob journeyed on to Succoth, and built a house for himself and made stalls for his cattle; that is why the place was called Succoth.

לְרֶגֶל הַמְּלָאכָה אֲשֶׁר־לְפָנַי וּלְרֶגֶל
הַיְלָדִים עַד אֲשֶׁר־אָבֹא אֶל־אֲדֹנִי שֵׂעִירָה׃
15 וַיֹּאמֶר עֵשָׂו אַצִּיגָה־נָּא עִמְּךָ מִן־הָעָם
אֲשֶׁר אִתִּי וַיֹּאמֶר לָמָּה זֶּה אֶמְצָא־חֵן
בְּעֵינֵי אֲדֹנִי׃ 16 וַיָּשָׁב בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא עֵשָׂו
לְדַרְכּוֹ שֵׂעִירָה׃ 17 וְיַעֲקֹב נָסַע סֻכֹּתָה וַיִּבֶן
לוֹ בַּיִת וּלְמִקְנֵהוּ עָשָׂה סֻכֹּת עַל־כֵּן קָרָא
שֵׁם־הַמָּקוֹם סֻכּוֹת׃ ס

OJPS gently, according to the pace of the cattle that are before me and according to the pace of the children, until I come unto my lord unto Seir."

15And Esau said: "Let me now leave with thee some of the folk that are with me." And he said: "What needeth it? let me find favor in the sight of my lord." 16So Esau returned that day on his way unto Seir. 17And Jacob journeyed to Succoth, and built him a house, and made booths for his cattle. Therefore the name of the place is called Succoth.

RASHI the end of the verb is extraneous: "I will travel" (compare OJPS). A similar form (with a different verb) is found in "I will go down to see" (18:21). **Slowly**. "In my slowness," that is, "gently" (OJPS); the ל is not a preposition but a root letter. Compare "deal *gently* with my boy Absalom" (2 Sam. 18:5); "the *gently* flowing waters of Siloam" (Isa. 8:6). **At the pace of the cattle**. Literally, "according to the legs of the work," that is, the pace of the animals I must lead. **And at the pace of the children**. According to their legs, to how fast they can walk. **Until I come to my lord in Seir**. More precisely, "to Seir" (compare OJPS). He told him the direction he was going, though he had no intention of going farther than Succoth. He thought, "If he intends evil, he will wait until I reach him." But he did not go to Seir at all. And when will he finally go? In the days of the Messiah, when "liberators shall march up on Mount Zion to wreak judgment on Mount Esau" (Obad. 1:21). And there are many midrashic elaborations of this as well.

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ When Esau says, "Let me assign to you some of the men who are with me" (v. 15), how Jacob really responds is, "Why should I find favor in my lord's eyes?" But—what sense does that make? And wasn't "finding favor" the whole purpose of the gift?

IBN EZRA superfluous, is a second indication of "I." **At the pace of the cattle**. Literally, "at the pace of the task," referring indeed to the cattle that were Jacob's livelihood. To me, it seems most plausible that the Hebrew word refers to whatever is within a person's power to do, whether directly or indirectly; the word can even refer to someone's wealth: "he has not laid hands on the other's *property*" (Exod. 22:7). The word for a "messenger" derives from the same root, since a messenger (including a divine "messenger," an angel) is under the control of the one who sends him. As for "at the pace," it is really the same word and same idiom as "wherever I turned" of 30:30. But of course this literally means "for the foot," and they are actually walking on their feet.

15 Oh no. What Jacob is really saying is "What for?" Why would you do me a favor I have no need of? **My lord is too kind to me!** Please, don't do me any favors.

16 So Esau started back that day on his way. All by himself, for the 400 men who were with him fell out of rank one by one. And where did the Holy One reward them? When "David attacked [the Amalekites] from before dawn until the evening of the next day; none of them escaped, *except four hundred young men* who mounted camels and got away" (1 Sam. 30:17).

17 But Jacob journeyed on to Succoth, and built a house for himself and made stalls for his cattle; that is why the place was called Succoth. He stayed there for 18 months—a summer, a winter, and a second summer, as the verse indicates: first in "Succoth" (shelters, during the warm weather), then in a cold-weather "house," and then again in "Succoth."

KIMHI Genesis Rabbah, Jacob's punishment for calling Esau "my lord" eight times was the eight Edomite kings listed in 36:31–39.

NAHMANIDES be interpreted to mean "I will travel next to you," saying that he did not want to separate from Jacob until he had made it all the way back home, to pay his respects to his father. But Jacob replied, "I will be traveling slowly; my lord should go back to the city where he rules, and if I pass that way he can welcome me and travel with me as far as he likes." Jacob was in no sense vowing that he would come to Seir, which Esau did not really need him to do in any case. Our Sages say that Jacob had no intention whatsoever of going to Seir and was merely trying to put as much distance as he could between himself and Esau, letting Esau think he would come as far as Seir. That would certainly have been a good plan. They have yet another midrash, explaining that Jacob will keep his word in the Messianic Era, based on the verse "For liberators shall march up on Mount Zion to wreak judgment on Mount Esau" (Obad. 1:21).

15 Oh no, my lord is too kind to me! See Rashi's comment. What Jacob means is that he wanted nothing to do with them, the more so as he intended to go in a completely different direction. Genesis Rabbah learns another lesson from this text: "R. Judah ha-Nasi, **[H]** when he went to deal with the government, would always look at this text and remember not to take a Roman escort. Once he forgot to look at it and did take some Romans along; by the time they reached Acre, he had already had to sell his cloak." There was a tradition among the Sages that this passage was about the exile. Whenever R. Judah had to go to Rome to the court of the kings of Edom on public business, he would review this passage so he could follow the advice of this wise elder. All the future generations would be able to see what he did and do it themselves, not associating with the Romans, who do not get friendly with people except for their own benefit, to relieve them of their money.

17 And built a house for himself and made stalls for his cattle. It may be that there was no city in that location, and that he indeed had to build a house and stalls. Or perhaps we are being told that he built himself a house so substantial that it would provide him with protection from Esau.

[H] Our texts of Nahmanides say "R. Yannai," but this is likely a copyist's error.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS "his lord," by which he meant his father. Even if an older brother deserves to be treated like one's father, that does not mean that "lord" could apply equally to both here (Abarbanel).

15 Oh no, my lord is too kind to me! I do not need protection, since I no longer have an enemy in the world (Abarbanel).

16 So Esau started back that day on his way. Rashi says he was all by himself—but see v. 15 (Hizkuni).

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NJPS [18]Jacob arrived safe in the city of Shechem which is in the land of Canaan—having come thus from Paddan-aram—and he encamped before the city. [19]The parcel of land where he pitched his tent he purchased from the children of Hamor, Shechem's father, for a

18 וַיָּבֹא֩ יַעֲקֹ֨ב שָׁלֵ֜ם עִ֣יר שְׁכֶ֗ם אֲשֶׁר֙ בְּאֶ֣רֶץ
כְּנַ֔עַן בְּבֹא֖וֹ מִפַּדַּ֣ן אֲרָ֑ם וַיִּחַ֥ן אֶת־פְּנֵ֖י
הָעִֽיר׃ 19 וַיִּקֶן֙ אֶת־חֶלְקַ֣ת הַשָּׂדֶ֔ה אֲשֶׁ֥ר
נָטָ֛ה־שָׁ֥ם אָהֳלֹ֖ו מִיַּ֣ד בְּנֵי־חֲמ֑וֹר אֲבִ֥י שְׁכֶֽם

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why are we told that "Jacob arrived safe" (v. 18) when he got to Shechem but not when he arrived anywhere else? ✦ Why are we told that he encamped "before the city"? He was there and had to camp somewhere. ✦ As for "the parcel of land" (v. 19) that he bought—what do we learn from this, or from being told who he bought it from and how much he paid, that is useful practically, morally, or intellectually? ✦ Why did Jacob buy the land "from the children of Hamor" when Hamor himself was still alive and ruling the city?

RASHI **18 Safe.** Rather, "whole"—whole in body, having been healed of his limp; whole in property, having not actually lost any of the gift he had given Esau; **[I]** and whole in Torah, having not forgotten any of the learning he acquired in Laban's house. **In the city of Shechem.** The absence of the preposition "in" (which is missing in the Hebrew) is idiomatic; compare "the two went on until they reached Bethlehem" (Ruth 1:19), where English uses a similar idiom. **Having come thus from Paddan-aram.** The text is informing us of this as a man tells his friend, "So-and-So is safe! He escaped from the jaws of the lions!" Here too, "Jacob arrived safely from Paddan-aram, having escaped from Laban and Esau, who paired up against him on the way."

19 A hundred kesitahs. A kesitah is a ma'ah. **[J]** Said R. Akiva: When I visited the coast, they called a ma'ah a "kesitah."

[I] It is not clear how this can be so. In his commentary on B. Shab. 33b, where the phrase is quoted, Rashi explains "whole in body" and "whole in Torah," but not "whole in property." **[J]** One-sixth of a dinar. A ma'ah is understood to be the equivalent of the biblical gerah; 20 gerahs make a shekel.

KIMHI **18 Jacob arrived safe in the city of Shechem.** No harm had come to him from anyone in the whole journey from Paddan-aram until he reached Shechem, where his daughter was harmed; that is why this is written here and not in v. 17, when he reached Succoth. **He encamped before the city.** The city may have been so small, and his camp so large, that if he had entered the city his people and livestock would have overwhelmed it.

19 The parcel of land where he pitched his tent he purchased from the children of Hamor. Apparently it was owned by them and not by their father.

NAHMANIDES **18 Jacob arrived safe . . . having come thus from Paddan-aram.** Despite Rashi and Ibn Ezra, I believe this is telling us that while he was in Succoth he was afraid of Esau. Remember that Succoth was on the east bank of the Jordan, in the kingdom of Sihon, if this is the same Succoth mentioned in Josh. 13:27. If it is a different Succoth, it would have to be even closer to Seir than that one. So he could not calm down until he had made it to Canaan, where he would be close enough to his father that he would not be harmed. At the very least the men of the land would assist him, since his father was "the elect of God" (23:6) among them. Or perhaps he felt that the merit of being in the land would protect him in and of itself. That is why we are told only now that he had arrived "in the land where his father had sojourned" (37:1) that he was "safe," that God had protected him from his enemies on the way. According to Genesis Rabbah: each and every month that Jacob spent at Succoth, he sent Esau the very same present—he was so afraid of him while he was there. (Or, according to another opinion, once a year.) **And he encamped before the city.** He did not want to be a guest in the city, but to live, now that he had returned to the land of Canaan, on his own place. That is why he encamped in the countryside and bought the property—to have a foothold in the land. Just as when "Abram passed through the land as far as the site of Shechem" (12:6, and see my comment there), this too was symbolic of the fact that his descendants would conquer that place in advance, before the inhabitants of the land were dispossessed by his descendants. When the Sages say that he set up a boundary around his land just before the Sabbath began, they do not mean that he did this deliberately; this too was a preview of the future. (See, however, Ibn Ezra's comment to v. 19.)

OJPS [18]And Jacob came in peace to the city of Shechem, which is in the land of Canaan, when he came from Paddan-aram; and encamped before the city. [19]And he bought the parcel of ground, where he had spread his tent, at the hand of the children of Hamor, Shechem's father, for a hundred pieces

RASHBAM **18 Jacob arrived safe.** Rather, "Jacob reached Salem." As in Ruth 1:19, the lack of the preposition is idiomatic. **The city of Shechem.** Salem was "the city of Shechem" just as "Heshbon was the city of Sihon" (Num. 21:26). Shechem, of course, was a person, as we see from 34:2. It is a mistake to explain Shechem as the name of the city. The idiom "the city of X" is never used to indicate the *name* of the city in Hebrew. Even if this is indeed the city that we elsewhere find called Shechem, the presumption is that it was named later, after the heroic deed of Jacob's sons. Compare "they changed the name of Leshem to Dan, after their ancestor Dan" (Josh. 19:47), also after capturing it. Cain too "founded a city, and named the city after his son Enoch" (4:17). The explanation that Jacob was "whole" in his Torah learning and "whole" in his wealth is likewise mistaken according to the straightforward sense; the text simply does not speak that way. And, indeed, what would be the point? Do we really need to be told, after this little gift that he gave Esau, that Jacob still had plenty of money?

IBN EZRA **18 Jacob arrived safe.** The word is indeed an adjective; he arrived "whole," that is, "in peace" (OJPS), in the sense that nothing happened to him. (For the text is about to tell us what happened with Dinah.) **In the city of Shechem.** Which was not Salem—that is Jerusalem. Jerusalem is quite far away, and Shechem did not rule over it.

19 The parcel of land. It is really just a "portion of ground," but the text is telling us that owning a portion of the land of Israel is like having a portion in the World to Come. **A hundred kesitahs.** 100 ewe-lambs. This is the Arabic name for them.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **18 Jacob arrived safe in the city of Shechem.** Rather, "Jacob arrived in Salem, the city of Shechem." It was called Salem at the time but was renamed for Shechem after this incident (Bekhor Shor). Salem was *one* of the cities of Shechem, who (as 36:2 reminds us) was "chief of the country"; but this Salem was definitely not Jerusalem, which Shechem never ruled over (Hizkuni). 37:12–14 demonstrate that the city of Shechem was near Hebron. But the Dinah episode took place elsewhere, quite far from Isaac. I think Shechem was the name of the whole territory ruled by Hamor. Jacob entered the far end of it when he returned from Paddan-aram and came to Salem. But Shechem, the city named after the region as a whole, was near Hebron, at the other end of the country (Abarbanel).

19 The parcel of land where he pitched his tent. If he had not camped so near the city, what happened to Dinah would never have happened (Abarbanel). **For a hundred kesitahs.** "For a hundred" anything occurs also only in Josh. 24:32, 1 Sam. 18:25, 2 Sam. 3:14, and 2 Chron. 25:6; "kesitah" is in the Joshua verse and nowhere else but Job 42:11 (Masorah). The word is not related to any other; we

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NJPS hundred kesitahs. [20]He set up an altar there, and called it El-elohe-yisrael.

34 Now Dinah, the daughter whom Leah had borne to Jacob, went out to visit the daughters of the

בְּמֵאָה קְשִׂיטָה׃ [20] וַיַּצֶּב־שָׁם מִזְבֵּחַ
וַיִּקְרָא־לוֹ אֵל אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל׃ ס

חמישי
לד וַתֵּצֵא דִינָהׇ בַּת־לֵאָה אֲשֶׁר
יָלְדָה לְיַעֲקֹב לִרְאוֹת בִּבְנוֹת הָאָרֶץ׃

OJPS of money. [20]And he erected there an altar, and called it El-elohe-Israel.

34 And Dinah the daughter of Leah, whom she had borne unto Jacob, went out to see the daughters

RASHI **20 And called it El-elohe-yisrael.** Not that the altar itself was called "God of Israel." But in honor of the Holy One's being with him and rescuing him, he named the altar after the miracle, so that anyone saying the name of the altar would be offering praise to God: "God"—that is, the Holy One—"is my God, and my name is Israel." Moses did the same: "Moses built an altar and named it Adonai-nissi" (Exod. 17:15). Again, the altar was not named after the Lord, but after the miracle. But the Sages read the Hebrew of our verse to say, "And the God of Israel called him [Jacob] 'El.'" The words of Torah are like "a hammer that shatters rock" (Jer. 23:29), with a single phrase splitting into many different meanings. My own purpose is simply to settle what each verse means in context.

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ How could Jacob name an altar—made up of dead, material objects—"El-elohe-yisrael," which means "God, the God of Israel"?

✦ Why must Dinah be identified as "the daughter whom Leah had borne to Jacob" (v. 1)? Was there some other Dinah on the scene?

34:1 Dinah, the daughter whom Leah had borne to Jacob, went out. Note that the Hebrew calls her "Dinah the daughter of Leah" (OJPS) and not "Dinah the daughter of Jacob." Leah too "went out" in her younger days: "Leah went out to meet him" (30:16).

KIMHI **20 He set up an altar there.** Saying that he "set it up" rather than that he "built" it implies that it was made of a single stone.

34:1 Now Dinah . . . went out. She went out of the tent of her mother and father.

NAHMANIDES **20 And called it El-elohe-yisrael.** See Rashi's comment, which does indeed explain the straightforward sense of the text. His point is that the altar was named after the event, just as was Benjamin (see 35:18), just as the returnees to Jerusalem would be called "repairer of fallen walls, restorer of lanes for habitation" (Isa. 58:12). It is a Jewish custom that names invoke some praise of God, like Zuriel (Num. 3:35) and Zurishaddai (Num. 7:36). Merely to read such names is to declare that "God is my Rock" or "the Almighty is my Rock." See similarly such names as "Immanuel" (Isa. 7:14, "God is with us"), "The LORD is our Vindicator" (Jer. 23:6), and "The LORD Is There" (Ezek. 48:35). Angels are given this kind of name as well, like Gabriel (Dan. 8:16, "God is mighty") and Michael (Dan. 10:13, "Who is like God?"). But Onkelos translates our phrase as "and he sacrificed upon it to El-elohe-yisrael," understanding it to say that Jacob invoked God "upon it" (which this preposition can sometimes mean); or it is an ethical dative, as in the Hebrew of "go forth" (12:1). **[I]** But the True explanation is that given by our Sages on B. Meg. 18a: "And the God of Israel called him [Jacob] 'El.'" There is a profound mystery in this statement, expressed in different words in Genesis Rabbah as well, where Jacob addresses the Holy One as follows: "You are God among those on high, I am God among those below." This alludes to what they always said—that an image of Jacob is carved onto the Throne of Glory. The point is that the Shekhinah rests upon the land of Israel. One who is enlightened will understand.

34:1 The daughter whom Leah had borne. This is to point out that Simeon and Levi, who would be outraged on her behalf and take vengeance for her, were her brothers. **To Jacob.** In fact, all the brothers were outraged on her behalf.

[I] See Nahmanides' comment there.

RASHBAM **20 El-elohe-yisrael.** The God who rescued me from Laban and Esau. The Hebrew name can be understood to mean "God is the God of Jacob." One might call a child Eliezer ("God is my help") or Immanuel ("with us is God"), and Jacob gave this altar the same kind of name. That is the straightforward sense.

34:1 Dinah . . . went out to visit the daughters of the land. Jacob had pitched her tent outside the city; she came out of the tent and went into town.

IBN EZRA **20 And called it El-elohe-yisrael.** Saadia says that he called "Him" (the Holy One) this, since it sounds like a divine name. But in fact it is the name of the altar, just as Moses named an altar "Adonai-nissi" (Exod. 17:15) for the miracle that the Holy One did in that location. So too Jerusalem will one day be called "The LORD Is There" (Ezek. 48:35). Because the Holy One had helped Jacob, he called the altar where he served Him El-elohe-yisrael, meaning, "the God of Israel is powerful." He called him "the God of Israel" because He had rescued him on the journey and brought him safely to the land of Canaan (where Shechem and Succoth are located). In my opinion Jacob must have stayed in this location for many years, because Dinah was only seven when they arrived. Simeon and Levi were still quite young too.

34:1 Now Dinah . . . went out. On her own.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS learn from the context that it most likely means "sheep," as Onkelos translates (Bekhor Shor). A miniscule amount, in biblical terms just four shekels and four gerahs (Gersonides).

20 He set up an altar there. This may also have played a role in what happened to Dinah. When he built this altar, people came out from the city to attend the dedication. That is where Shechem saw Dinah and was drawn to her. She "went out to visit the daughters of the land" and what happened, happened (Abarbanel). **And called it El-elohe-yisrael.** Rather, "for God, the God of Israel, had called him [there]." This prophecy may not have been recorded, since its content had nothing new, or this might be the prophecy that is recorded in 35:1. Again, Ibn Ezra's explanation is less plausible than the one I have given (Gersonides).

34:1 The daughters of the land. The only other occurrence of the Hebrew phrase is in 27:46 (Masorah). Notice that she went out to visit the daughters—not the sons or the men. Rashi's comment is uncalled for; Leah was quite modest (which is why Jacob did not recognize her when he slept with her on his wedding night). And 30:16 only means that she came out to the entrance of the tent. Dinah wanted to spend time with the girls, as is only natural; don't forget that she grew up in a household where all the other children were boys. And she certainly did not go out unaccompanied even if the text does not elaborate on that (Abarbanel).

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NJPS land. [2]Shechem son of Hamor the Hivite, chief of the country, saw her, and took her and lay with her by force. [3]Being strongly drawn to Dinah daughter of Jacob, and in love with the maiden, he spoke to the maiden tenderly. [4]So Shechem said to his father Hamor, "Get me this girl as a wife."

[5]Jacob heard that he had defiled his daughter Dinah; but since his sons were in the field with his cattle, Jacob kept silent until they came home. [6]Then Shechem's father Hamor came out to Jacob to speak to him. [7]Meanwhile Jacob's sons, having heard the news, came in from the field. The men were distressed and very angry, because he had committed an outrage in Israel by lying with Jacob's daughter—a thing not to be done.

2 וַיַּ֣רְא אֹתָ֗הּ שְׁכֶם֙ בֶּן־חֲמ֣וֹר הַחִוִּ֔י נְשִׂ֖יא
הָאָ֑רֶץ וַיִּקַּ֥ח אֹתָ֛הּ וַיִּשְׁכַּ֥ב אֹתָ֖הּ וַיְעַנֶּֽהָ׃
3 וַתִּדְבַּ֤ק נַפְשׁוֹ֙ בְּדִינָ֣ה בַת־יַעֲקֹ֔ב וַיֶּֽאֱהַ֥ב
אֶת־הנער הַנַּעֲרָ֖ה וַיְדַבֵּ֥ר עַל־לֵ֛ב הנער
הַנַּעֲרָֽה׃ 4 וַיֹּ֨אמֶר שְׁכֶ֜ם אֶל־חֲמ֣וֹר אָבִ֗יו
לֵאמֹר֙ קַֽח־לִ֣י אֶת־הַיַּלְדָּ֔ה הַזֹּ֖את לְאִשָּֽׁה׃
5 וְיַעֲקֹ֗ב שָׁמַ֤ע כִּֽי־טִמֵּא֙ אֶת־דִּינָ֣ה בִתּ֔וֹ
וּבָנָ֥יו הָי֖וּ אֶת־מִקְנֵ֑הוּ בַּשָּׂדֶה֙ וְהֶחֱרַ֣שׁ
יַעֲקֹ֔ב עַד־בֹּאָֽם׃ 6 וַיֵּצֵ֥א חֲמ֛וֹר אֲבִֽי־שְׁכֶ֖ם
אֶל־יַעֲקֹ֑ב לְדַבֵּ֖ר אִתּֽוֹ׃ 7 וּבְנֵ֣י יַעֲקֹ֗ב בָּ֤אוּ
מִן־הַשָּׂדֶה֙ כְּשָׁמְעָ֔ם וַיִּתְעַצְּב֥וּ הָאֲנָשִׁ֖ים
וַיִּֽחַר־לָהֶ֣ם מְאֹ֑ד כִּֽי־נְבָלָ֤ה עָשָׂה֙ בְּיִשְׂרָאֵ֔ל
לִשְׁכַּ֥ב אֶת־בַּת־יַעֲקֹ֖ב וְכֵ֥ן לֹ֖א יֵעָשֶֽׂה׃

OJPS of the land. [2]And Shechem the son of Hamor the Hivite, the prince of the land, saw her; and he took her, and lay with her, and humbled her. [3]And his soul did cleave unto Dinah the daughter of Jacob, and he loved the damsel, and spoke comfortingly unto the damsel. [4]And Shechem spoke unto his father Hamor, saying: "Get me this damsel to wife."

[5]Now Jacob heard that he had defiled Dinah his daughter; and his sons were with his cattle in the field; and Jacob held his peace until they came. [6]And Hamor the father of Shechem went out unto Jacob to speak with him. [7]And the sons of Jacob came in from the field when they heard it; and the men were grieved, and they were very wroth, because he had wrought a vile deed in Israel in lying with Jacob's daughter; which thing ought not to be done.

RASHI **2 And took her.** Indicating vaginal intercourse. **And lay with her by force.** Rather, "and violated her," indicating anal intercourse.

3 He spoke to the maiden tenderly. Literally, he spoke "onto her heart," using words that would set her mind at ease: "Look how much money your father shelled out on a tiny piece of ground. When I marry you, the city and all its surrounding land will belong to you." **[K]**

7 A thing not to be done. Violating virgins in this way. Even among the other nations, this kind of thing had been ruled out after the Flood.

[K] Most texts of Rashi's comment say "you will be able to buy" the entire city—but the verb is masculine, so the precise meaning of the comment is unclear.

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Since "Shechem's father Hamor came out to Jacob to speak to him" (v. 6), why does he not actually do so? Instead, he speaks only later, with Jacob's sons, as if Jacob himself were not even there. ✦ Why are we not told that Jacob's sons "were distressed and very angry" (v. 7) until after Hamor came to speak with Jacob?

RASHBAM **7 Jacob's sons . . . came in from the field.** While Hamor was coming out to speak with Jacob.

IBN EZRA **2 Lay with her by force.** The "force" involved was because she was a virgin.

3 He spoke to the maiden tenderly. The Hebrew idiom is that he spoke "to the heart" of the maiden, which does indeed mean that he spoke to her "comfortingly" (OJPS) or "tenderly."

5 Jacob heard that he had defiled his daughter. "He," Shechem.

KIMHI **3 Being strongly drawn to Dinah daughter of Jacob, and in love with the maiden.** Both because of her beauty and because her father was rich and respected. **He spoke to the maiden tenderly.** Having violated her, he wanted her not to be angry at him; he told her that he would marry her, and that he was the "chief of the country" (v. 2).

5 Jacob heard that he had defiled his daughter Dinah. The defilement was that an uncircumcised man had sex with her. **Jacob kept silent until they came home.** He did not go to the city and complain.

7 He had committed an outrage in Israel. All of Israel's descendants would be stained by this outrage he had committed. **A thing not to be done.** Against anyone, least of all the daughter of Jacob.

NAHMANIDES **2 And lay with her by force.** Neither Rashi's interpretation nor Ibn Ezra's is necessary. Any act of intercourse that is done "by force" (as NJPS correctly understands) is intrinsically humiliating. When a soldier forces a captive woman to sleep with him, he is told, "Since you *had your will of her,* you must not enslave her" (Deut. 21:14). See also what the Levite said about the citizens of Gibeah: "they meant to kill me, and they *ravished* my concubine until she died" (Judg. 20:5). The text is actually speaking in praise of her. Despite the fact that he was the "chief of the country," she had no interest in him; he had to take her by force.

7 A thing not to be done. I don't think Rashi is correct. The Canaanites were certainly steeped in incest, bestiality, and homosexuality: "all those abhorrent things were done by the people who were in the land before you" (Lev. 18:27). They certainly had not just started to do that in Moses' time. Remember that Abraham and Isaac were already afraid of being killed so that the Canaanites could take their wives. **[J]** But this was "a thing not to be done" *in Israel.* It was not regarded as an outrage among the Canaanites. When Onkelos calls it "improper," he means that it is forbidden. That is why it was an outrage.

[J] See chs. 20 and 26.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **2 And lay with her by force.** The phrase (a single word in Hebrew) occurs also only in 2 Sam. 13:14 (Masorah). Shechem committed three evils: "taking" her by force into his home, "lying" with her and taking her virginity; and "humbling" her (a separate verb in the Hebrew; see OJPS)—that is, "brutalizing" her. As rabbinic sources explain, even a rape victim sometimes experiences sexual pleasure against her will; but Dinah experienced only pain (Abarbanel).

5 Jacob kept silent until they came home. He did not call his sons home or even send them the news; he did not want to get them too excited (Abarbanel).

6 Shechem's father Hamor came out to Jacob to speak to him. He saw that Jacob had kept silent and was worried that he was planning some evil (Sforno).

7 Jacob's sons, having heard the news, came in from the field. Having heard the news, they hurried in (Hizkuni). The Hebrew is more literally "the sons of Jacob came in from the field—when they heard it—the men were grieved" (compare OJPS), and it is not clear whether "when they heard it" goes with the first phrase or the second (Abarbanel). **The men were distressed and very angry.** Distress

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NJPS [8]And Hamor spoke with them, saying, "My son Shechem longs for your daughter. Please give her to him in marriage. [9]Intermarry with us: give your daughters to us, and take our daughters for yourselves: [10]You will dwell among us, and the land will be open before you; settle, move about, and acquire holdings in it." [11]Then Shechem said to her father and brothers, "Do me this favor, and I will pay whatever you tell me. [12]Ask of me a bride-price ever so high, as well as gifts, and I will pay what you tell me; only give me the maiden for a wife."

[13]Jacob's sons answered Shechem and his father Hamor—speaking with guile because he had defiled their sister

OJPS [8]And Hamor spoke with them, saying "The soul of my son Shechem longeth for your daughter. I pray you give her unto him to wife. [9]And make ye marriages with us; give your daughters unto us, and take our daughters unto you. [10]And ye shall dwell with us; and the land shall be before you; dwell and trade ye therein, and get you possessions therein." [11]And Shechem said unto her father and unto her brethren: "Let me find favor in your eyes, and what ye shall say unto me I will give. [12]Ask me never so much dowry and gift, and I will give according as ye shall say unto me; but give me the damsel to wife."

[13]And the sons of Jacob answered Shechem and Hamor his father with guile, and spoke, because he had defiled Dinah their

8 וַיְדַבֵּר חֲמוֹר אִתָּם לֵאמֹר שְׁכֶם בְּנִי
חָשְׁקָה נַפְשׁוֹ בְּבִתְּכֶם תְּנוּ נָא אֹתָהּ
לוֹ לְאִשָּׁה׃ 9 וְהִתְחַתְּנוּ אֹתָנוּ בְּנֹתֵיכֶם
תִּתְּנוּ־לָנוּ וְאֶת־בְּנֹתֵינוּ תִּקְחוּ לָכֶם׃
10 וְאִתָּנוּ תֵּשֵׁבוּ וְהָאָרֶץ תִּהְיֶה לִפְנֵיכֶם
שְׁבוּ וּסְחָרוּהָ וְהֵאָחֲזוּ בָּהּ׃ 11 וַיֹּאמֶר
שְׁכֶם אֶל־אָבִיהָ וְאֶל־אַחֶיהָ אֶמְצָא־חֵן
בְּעֵינֵיכֶם וַאֲשֶׁר תֹּאמְרוּ אֵלַי אֶתֵּן׃
12 הַרְבּוּ עָלַי מְאֹד מֹהַר וּמַתָּן וְאֶתְּנָה
כַּאֲשֶׁר תֹּאמְרוּ אֵלַי וּתְנוּ־לִי אֶת־הַנַּעַר
הַנַּעֲרָה לְאִשָּׁה׃
13 וַיַּעֲנוּ בְנֵי־יַעֲקֹב אֶת־שְׁכֶם וְאֶת־חֲמוֹר
אָבִיו בְּמִרְמָה וַיְדַבֵּרוּ אֲשֶׁר טִמֵּא אֶת דִּינָה

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why did Jacob's sons speak "with guile" (v. 13) instead of taking their revenge directly and openly as honorable men would be expected to do? ✦ What is the point of saying "because he had defiled their sister Dinah"? It hardly explains their guile. And, if it is just telling us the fact, we already know it.

RASHI **8 My son Shechem longs for your daughter.** He desires her.

12 A bride-price. That is, the guarantee written into the marriage contract.

13 Speaking with guile. Rather, "speaking craftily." **Because he had defiled their sister.** It is not—as the Hebrew might

KIMHI **8 And Hamor spoke with them.** With Jacob and his sons. **Your daughter.** Addressing Jacob as the most important of the group. And of course a man cares for his sister as much as if she were his own daughter.

10 Acquire holdings in it. Thereby joining the great men of the city.

13 Jacob's sons answered Shechem and his father Hamor—speaking with guile because he had defiled their sister Dinah. But Jacob himself, though the injury had been done to him, did not speak with guile; he left that to his sons.

RASHBAM **8 And Hamor spoke with them.** Having encountered them.

9 Give your daughters to us, and take our daughters for yourselves. Here Hamor honors the sons of Jacob by implying that all the decisions about marriage will be in their hands. But when he and Shechem speak to their fellow townsmen in v. 21, they say the opposite—*they* will do the taking and the giving. But that was simply to mislead them into agreeing to be circumcised.

10 Move about. **[B]**

[B] Rashbam's explanation of the form of this verb—it is "caused by חית [the guttural letter *ḥet*]"—is a pun on the expression "it is caused by חטא" ("sin," also *ḥet*).

IBN EZRA **13 Because he had defiled their sister Dinah.** This is a possible translation, but it is also possible that it

NAHMANIDES **12 Ask of me a bride-price ever so high, as well as gifts.** The "bride-price" is the money given to the virgin herself: "If her father refuses to give her to him, he must still weigh out silver in accordance with the bride-price for virgins" (Exod. 22:16)—the engagement presents. The "gifts" are the presents (or the gold or silver) given to her father and her brothers. The point of offering these gifts was to reconcile all of them to the marriage. For the girl resented being with him, and was constantly shrieking and crying. That is also why "he spoke to the maiden tenderly" (v. 3). This is also why Shechem told his father, "Get me this girl as a wife" (v. 4). She was already in his house and in his power; he had no fear of her brothers, for he was the "chief of the country." They could not possibly get her away from him. His intense desire for her was because of her great beauty, though the text does not say so, as it does of Sarah, Rebekah, and Rachel, because it ended up being a negative for her. The text praises the Matriarchs for their beauty, but it would not be praise to mention it in this case. Similarly, we are told nothing of what happened to her afterward. Presumably she remained with her brothers in a kind of living widowhood. For they considered her "defiled" (v. 13). The Sages offer different opinions about what happened to her; the most plausible is that Simeon took charge of her, eventually burying her in Canaan. That is, as we said, she stayed in his home as a widow, went down to Egypt with them, died there, and was brought back to the land for burial. The tradition is that her grave site is in the city of Arbel, next to the grave of Nittai the Arbelite. But it is not certain whether Simeon brought her bones up to the land for burial (out of special concern for her) or whether they were brought up eventually by the Israelites along with the bones of all the rest of her brothers.

13 Jacob's sons answered Shechem and his father Hamor—speaking with guile. Hamor and Shechem spoke to her father as

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS is inner-directed, anger is outer-directed (Abarbanel). **He had committed an outrage in Israel by lying with Jacob's daughter—a thing not to be done.** All three of Shechem's evil deeds are invoked: the "outrage," taking her; lying with her; and the "thing not to be done," brutalizing her (Abarbanel).

8 Hamor spoke with them. So far from understanding their distress and anger, he did not even think they knew yet what had happened (Abarbanel). **My son Shechem longs for your daughter. Please give her to him in marriage.** He assumed they were simple shepherds and would be overwhelmed by the honor of such a match (Abarbanel).

9 Take our daughters for yourselves. Hamor said this in case they found out that Shechem had taken Dinah. The implication was, "It will not bother us if you do the same" (Abarbanel).

10 Move about. Rather, "trade" in the land (see OJPS). Outsiders were not permitted to engage in trade in those days (Sforno).

11 I will pay whatever you tell me. No matter what dowry my father asks of you [as was the custom in those days] I will give it back to you, and more. I want the girl, not the money (Abarbanel).

12 Ask of me. Not of my father (Abarbanel). **Ever so high.** As if I were paying a fine for the crime I committed against you (Sforno).

13 Speaking with guile because he had defiled their sister Dinah. It was Shechem who was "speaking with guile," saying, "You

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NJPS Dinah—[14]and said to them, "We cannot do this thing, to give our sister to a man who is uncircumcised, for that is a disgrace among us. [15]Only on this condition will we agree with you; that you will

OJPS sister, [14]and said unto them: "We cannot do this thing, to give our sister to one that is uncircumcised; for that were a reproach unto us. [15]Only on this condition will we consent unto you: if ye will be as

אֲחוֹתָם׃ 14 וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֲלֵיהֶם לֹא נוּכַל לַעֲשׂוֹת הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה לָתֵת אֶת־אֲחוֹתֵנוּ לְאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ עָרְלָה כִּי־חֶרְפָּה הִוא לָנוּ׃ 15 אַךְ־בְּזֹאת נֵאוֹת לָכֶם אִם תִּהְיוּ כָמֹנוּ

RASHI be read—that they had *told* Hamor that his son had defiled their sister.

14 That is a disgrace. Rather (as this Hebrew word always means) "a reproach" (OJPS), "an insult." Among us, being uncircumcised is considered something of a stain on the family. When a person wants to insult someone, he calls him "uncircumcised" or "son of an uncircumcised man."

15 Will we agree with you. Will we be reconciled with you. Compare "the priests agreed" (2 Kings 12:9).

IBN EZRA means they "answered Shechem (who had defiled their sister, Dinah) and Hamor, his father, with guile, and spoke."

14 A man who is uncircumcised. More precisely, "a man who has a foreskin." But "foreskin" is often used metaphorically for "an obstacle," as when Moses calls himself "a man of *impeded* speech" (Exod. 6:12) or the prophet says of Israel that "their ears are *blocked*" (Jer. 6:10). There are those who argue that the Holy One told Abraham, "Walk in My ways and be perfect" (17:1), and that his subsequent circumcision left him, by the removal of his foreskin, *im*perfect, but they have it backward. The fact that animals do not have foreskins refutes them. Should they ask why he would cut off something that the Holy One created him with, we can refute that as well—with the umbilical cord. **A disgrace.** A permanent disgrace, down through the generations, explaining why they said that he had committed an outrage "in Israel" (v. 7).

NAHMANIDES well as her brothers, but the old man did not say a thing; his sons spoke on his behalf out of respect for him, to keep him from having to deal with such a sordid affair. But this raises a question. Since they were speaking in front of him, he would seem to have acquiesced; but then why did he get angry with them, as we see in v. 30? And he cannot possibly have been willing to marry his daughter to the Canaanite who had defiled her. Note too that all the sons were "speaking with guile," but only Simeon and Levi did the deed, and their father cursed "their anger so fierce, and their wrath so relentless" (49:7)—theirs alone. But the "guile" was simply in the demand that all the men of the city be circumcised. They did not think they would agree. But if somehow their chief persuaded them to do it, then the brothers would come on the third day, when they were in pain, and take the girl out of Shechem's house. That was the brothers' plan, and they had their father's permission. Simeon and Levi wanted revenge, though, and killed every male. Jacob's curse may have been directed at their killing men who had done nothing to him; they should not have killed anyone but Shechem. **Because he had defiled their sister Dinah.** This was the reason they all agreed to "speak with guile." Many have wondered how Jacob's righteous sons could have spilled all this innocent blood. As Maimonides explains in the *Mishneh Torah*, all human beings are commanded to establish a system of justice; the inhabitants of Shechem were therefore guilty for not bringing Shechem, Hamor's son, to trial. But I do not think this is correct. If it were so, then Jacob would certainly have been obligated to be the first to kill them. Even if he was too afraid to do the killing, why he was angry at Simeon and Levi—and such a long time afterward—for doing it? But remember that failing to establish a system of justice was a sin of omission, not one of commission. There is no death penalty for neglecting to do something. **[K]** Does Maimonides really expect the people of whom we are told "you shall not learn to imitate the abhorrent practices of those nations" (Deut. 18:9) to have a court system? But it was not the place of Jacob and his sons to handle this. However, knowing how wicked the people of Shechem were, Jacob's sons felt justified in spilling their blood like water and taking their revenge, killing the king and all the men of the city, who were his vassals and obedient to his bidding. As for the circumcisions, that meant nothing to them; the men of Shechem had agreed to it simply to ingratiate themselves with their lord. Jacob tells Simeon and Levi right away (see v. 30) that they have put him in danger. The reason he curses them later is that the Shechemites had agreed to become "one kindred" (v. 16) with them—that is, they had chosen the Holy One, but Jacob's sons had broken their word. **[L]** They might in fact return to the Lord, in which case they had killed them for nothing. The others had not done Jacob's sons any harm. That is why Jacob said of Simeon and Levi, "Their weapons are tools of lawlessness" (49:5). **[M]** If we are to believe *The Book of the Wars of Jacob's Sons*, what their father feared did indeed come to pass. The neighboring cities mustered their troops and fought three mighty battles against them. Had their father not strapped on his own weapons and fought alongside them, they would have been in mortal danger (as that book explains). The Sages make reference to this in their interpretation of 48:22 (and see Rashi's comment there). Our text says nothing about it, since that was one of the "hidden" miracles; Jacob and his sons were great fighters and they seemed to have won those battles by their own prowess. Similarly our text does not tell us a single thing about the adventures of Abraham in Ur or about Esau's war with the Horites. But in this story we are at least told that "a terror from God fell on the cities round about [as a result of that war], so that they did not pursue the sons of Jacob" (35:5) and that afterward Jacob came to Luz unharmed, "he and *all* the people who were with him" (35:6).

[K] We omit Nahmanides' more complicated disagreement with Maimonides about the judicial obligations of non-Jews. **[L]** There is some confusion in the text here; another possible reading is that the Shechemites "had chosen them and trusted their word." **[M]** See Nahmanides' comment there.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS will have no disgrace in this matter. I will marry her and will pay a huge bride-price. I never touched her" (Bekhor Shor). This is not the correct interpretation. Why would they not have been willing to give her to the son of the ruler, as long as he was circumcised? Who else could they marry her to, now, who would enter the covenant of Israel? (Abarbanel). Rather, they said straight out that "he had defiled their sister Dinah," which meant that the bride-price and gifts they offered were in the nature of what Deut. 23:19 calls "the fee of a whore" (Sforno).

14 And said to them. This was the "guile"—that they both "answered" (v. 13) and "said" (here). They made as if to answer the offer of marriage, but actually spoke in a way that condemned him for defiling Dinah. "We don't want to hear anything about how he 'longs' for Dinah. We know the truth—he defiled her!" (Abarbanel). **That is a disgrace among us.** If you are not circumcised as we are, sooner or later you will start saying we are blemished for being circumcised (Hizkuni). It would look as if there were no respectable circumcised men who were willing to marry into the family (Sforno).

15 Only on this condition will we agree with you. They assumed it would never happen. As the old saying goes, "Shechem got the wife and Mabgai got the knife?" Once the men of Shechem refused, the sons of Jacob would be able to take their just revenge. This little scheme was the "guile" on their part (Bekhor Shor). If Shechem could not convince the men of his town to do this, he was not much of a

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NJPS become like us in that every male among you is circumcised. 16Then we will give our daughters to you and take your daughters to ourselves; and we will dwell among you and become as one kindred. 17But if you will not listen to us and become circumcised, we will take our daughter and go."

18Their words pleased Hamor and Hamor's son Shechem. 19And the youth lost no time in doing the thing, for he wanted Jacob's daughter. Now he was the most respected in his father's house. 20So Hamor and his son Shechem went to the public place of their town and spoke to their fellow townsmen, saying, 21"These people are our friends; let them settle in the land and move about in it, for the land is large enough for them; we will take their daughters to ourselves as wives and give

לְהִמּוֹל לָכֶם כָּל־זָכָר׃ 16 וְנָתַנּוּ אֶת־בְּנֹתֵינוּ
לָכֶם וְאֶת־בְּנֹתֵיכֶם נִקַּח־לָנוּ וְיָשַׁבְנוּ
אִתְּכֶם וְהָיִינוּ לְעַם אֶחָד׃ 17 וְאִם־לֹא
תִשְׁמְעוּ אֵלֵינוּ לְהִמּוֹל וְלָקַחְנוּ אֶת־בִּתֵּנוּ
וְהָלָכְנוּ׃
18 וַיִּיטְבוּ דִבְרֵיהֶם בְּעֵינֵי חֲמוֹר וּבְעֵינֵי
שְׁכֶם בֶּן־חֲמוֹר׃ 19 וְלֹא־אֵחַר הַנַּעַר
לַעֲשׂוֹת הַדָּבָר כִּי חָפֵץ בְּבַת־יַעֲקֹב וְהוּא
נִכְבָּד מִכֹּל בֵּית אָבִיו׃ 20 וַיָּבֹא חֲמוֹר
וּשְׁכֶם בְּנוֹ אֶל־שַׁעַר עִירָם וַיְדַבְּרוּ אֶל־
אַנְשֵׁי עִירָם לֵאמֹר׃ 21 הָאֲנָשִׁים הָאֵלֶּה
שְׁלֵמִים הֵם אִתָּנוּ וְיֵשְׁבוּ בָאָרֶץ וְיִסְחֲרוּ
אֹתָהּ וְהָאָרֶץ הִנֵּה רַחֲבַת־יָדַיִם לִפְנֵיהֶם
אֶת־בְּנֹתָם נִקַּח־לָנוּ לְנָשִׁים וְאֶת־בְּנֹתֵינוּ

OJPS we are, that every male of you be circumcised; 16then will we give our daughters unto you, and we will take your daughters to us, and we will dwell with you, and we will become one people. 17But if ye will not hearken unto us, to be circumcised; then will we take our daughter, and we will be gone."

18And their words pleased Hamor, and Shechem Hamor's son. 19And the young man deferred not to do the thing, because he had delight in Jacob's daughter. And he was honored above all the house of his father. 20And Hamor and Shechem his son came unto the gate of their city, and spoke with the men of their city, saying: 21"These men are peaceable with us; therefore let them dwell in the land, and trade therein; for, behold, the land is large enough for them; let us take their daughters to us for

RASHI **16 We will give.** The second נ has a *dagesh* to show that it is counted twice, serving both as the last נ of the root and as the indicator of "we." **And take your daughters to ourselves.** Just as Hamor had said: "take our daughters for yourselves" (v. 9). The condition would be that Jacob's sons could take whichever of the Canaanite girls they wanted, but also that they would only give the Canaanites the girls they wanted to give. In both cases, Jacob's sons would be making the decisions. But when Hamor and Shechem present the suggestion to their townsmen in v. 21 they reverse these conditions in order to persuade them to be circumcised.

21 These people are our friends. Literally, "they are *shelemim*," they come in peace (*shalom*) and are whole-hearted (*b'lev shalem*). **For the land is large enough for them.** Literally, it is "broad-handed," like one who gestures and gives liberally. It was as much as to say, "You will lose nothing by this. Plenty of merchandise already comes here that does not find a buyer."

KIMHI **20 So Hamor and his son Shechem went to the public place of their town.** Literally, to "the gate" (OJPS), where the elders and the important men of the city would gather for city business: "his brother's widow shall appear before the elders in the gate" (Deut. 25:7); "Boaz had gone to the gate" (Ruth 4:1).

21 These people are our friends. We need not be on our guard against them, despite what I did to their sister; they want to settle down with us. They are really asking us for very little—certainly not for any of our possessions.

RASHBAM **16 We will give.** For another example of this verb form, see *"We hold out* a hand to Egypt" (Lam. 5:6).

19 Now he was the most respected in his father's house. So they heeded him.

IBN EZRA **17 Our daughter.** So called because she was still quite young. And of course they were speaking on behalf of their father.

19 And the youth lost no time. The verb is a Piel perfect (for the form, compare "Naboth has reviled God" of 1 Kings 21:13), not the Qal imperfect this same form represents in 32:5.

21 These people are our friends. More literally, they are "peaceable" with us (OJPS). **The land is large enough.** Literally, it "has wide enough hands," that is, in the Hebrew idiom, enough "locations." Compare "there shall be an *area* for you outside the camp" (Deut. 23:13).

NAHMANIDES **21 These people are our friends.** For the people of the city thought they were enemies, seeing how upset and angry they were. They might have installed bars and gates, knowing that Jacob's sons were valiant warriors. But now Hamor and Shechem were saying, "Don't be afraid, don't be distant. They are wholeheartedly friendly to us."

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS "chief"; and if Shechem himself would not do it they would have a good excuse for not marrying Dinah to him (Gersonides). They assumed that no one would actually agree to be circumcised, and that Shechem would realize they were insulting him and react angrily—which would permit them to take their revenge (Abarbanel).

16 Then we will give our daughters to you. This was further guile; a promise that they would give their daughters to them, in addition to the great benefit that would come to them from the circumcision itself. But notice that they are careful never to promise directly to give Dinah to Shechem. They actually began by saying the precise opposite (in v. 14): "We cannot do this thing" (Abarbanel). **We will dwell among you and become as one kindred.** But we, who are circumcised, cannot become uncircumcised; you, who are uncircumcised, have to be circumcised if we are to be one people (Bekhor Shor).

17 But if you will not listen to us and become circumcised, we will take our daughter and go. They did state precisely what would happen if they refused to be circumcised: "We will not stay here and let everyone point at Dinah and say, 'Shechem slept with her!'" (Abarbanel).

18 Their words pleased Hamor and Hamor's son Shechem. In the words of Ps. 119:70 and Ps. 82:5, "Their minds were thick like fat . . . They neither knew nor understood" (Abarbanel).

19 And the youth lost no time in doing the thing. Circumcising himself, being in such a hurry that he was the first to do so (Abarbanel).

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NJPS our daughters to them. [22]But only on this condition will the men agree with us to dwell among us and be as one kindred: that all our males become circumcised as they are circumcised. [23]Their cattle and substance and all their beasts will be ours, if we only agree to their terms, so that they will settle among us." [24]All who went out of the gate of his town heeded Hamor and his son Shechem, and all males, all those who went out of the gate of his town,were circumcised.

[25]On the third day, when they were in pain, Simeon and Levi, two of Jacob's sons, brothers of Dinah, took each his sword, came upon the city unmolested, and slew all the males. [26]They put Hamor and his son Shechem to the sword, took Dinah out of Shechem's house, and went away. [27]The other sons of Jacob came upon the slain

OJPS wives, and let us give them our daughters. [22]Only on this condition will the men consent unto us to dwell with us, to become one people, if every male among us be circumcised, as they are circumcised. [23]Shall not their cattle and their substance and all their beasts be ours? only let us consent unto them, and they will dwell with us." [24]And unto Hamor and unto Shechem his son hearkened all that went out of the gate of his city; and every male was circumcised, all that went out of the gate of his city.

[25]And it came to pass on the third day, when they were in pain, that two of the sons of Jacob, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brethren, took each man his sword, and came upon the city unawares, and slew all the males. [26]And they slew Hamor and Shechem his son with the edge of the sword, and took Dinah out of Shechem's house, and went forth. [27]The sons of Jacob

נִתֵּן לָהֶם׃ [22] אַךְ־בְּזֹאת יֵאֹתוּ לָנוּ
הָאֲנָשִׁים לָשֶׁבֶת אִתָּנוּ לִהְיוֹת לְעַם אֶחָד
בְּהִמּוֹל לָנוּ כָּל־זָכָר כַּאֲשֶׁר הֵם נִמֹּלִים׃
[23] מִקְנֵהֶם וְקִנְיָנָם וְכָל־בְּהֶמְתָּם הֲלוֹא לָנוּ
הֵם אַךְ נֵאוֹתָה לָהֶם וְיֵשְׁבוּ אִתָּנוּ׃
[24] וַיִּשְׁמְעוּ אֶל־חֲמוֹר וְאֶל־שְׁכֶם בְּנוֹ כָּל־
יֹצְאֵי שַׁעַר עִירוֹ וַיִּמֹּלוּ כָּל־זָכָר כָּל־יֹצְאֵי
שַׁעַר עִירוֹ׃
[25] וַיְהִי ׀ בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי בִּהְיוֹתָם כֹּאֲבִים
וַיִּקְחוּ שְׁנֵי־בְנֵי־יַעֲקֹב שִׁמְעוֹן וְלֵוִי אֲחֵי
דִינָהּ אִישׁ חַרְבּוֹ וַיָּבֹאוּ עַל־הָעִיר בֶּטַח
וַיַּהַרְגוּ כָּל־זָכָר׃ [26] וְאֶת־חֲמוֹר וְאֶת־שְׁכֶם
בְּנוֹ הָרְגוּ לְפִי־חָרֶב וַיִּקְחוּ אֶת־דִּינָהּ מִבֵּית
שְׁכֶם וַיֵּצֵאוּ׃ [27] בְּנֵי יַעֲקֹב בָּאוּ עַל־

RASHI **23 If we only agree to their terms.** "Terms" is not in the Hebrew (see OJPS), but NJPS understands correctly; it was about agreeing to this particular condition.

25 Simeon and Levi, two of Jacob's sons. The text is emphasizing that despite being Jacob's sons Simeon and Levi conducted themselves without regard to that. They did not take counsel with him about what to do. **Brothers of Dinah.** In their praise, they are also identified as Dinah's brothers, for they put themselves in harm's way for her sake. **Unmolested.** Since the men of the town were all in pain. But the Hebrew more literally means "confident." A midrash says: They were confident in the strength of their old man.

27 The other sons of Jacob came upon the slain. To strip them of anything valuable.

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why did all the men of Shechem agree to be circumcised? Why didn't they just tell Hamor and Shechem, "Go ahead and take her and let's see what Jacob can possibly do about it. You have already slept with her anyway"? ✦ Why were the men of the city so greatly "in pain" (v. 25) on the third day? According to our tradition, when Abraham "saw three men" (18:1) and ran to greet them, it was the third day after his circumcision. He was an old man but obviously his circumcision had already healed.

RASHBAM **25 When they were in pain.** The straightforward sense, both of the text and of the situation, is that they were *still* in pain as they had been on the first and second days. **Came upon the city unmolested.** Rather, "came upon the city unawares" (OJPS). More precisely, they "came upon the city" where the residents were living so "securely" that they were not on their guard. Whether in the Torah or the Prophets, the Hebrew word always refers to people who are living in security, not to the security of the attackers.

IBN EZRA **22 Will the men agree with us.** For the verb, compare "that is Your *due*" (Jer. 10:7); the vowel under the א indicates the missing י of the root. **Become circumcised.** I explained this form in my comment to 17:10.

23 Their cattle and substance and all their beasts will be ours. So they in fact had evil intent toward Jacob and his sons.

25 On the third day. Which is always the most difficult, being halfway through one quarter of a lunar cycle. **Simeon and Levi, two of Jacob's sons, brothers of Dinah.** They did this with the full knowledge of their brothers; remember that *all* "Jacob's sons" spoke "with guile" (v. 13). Jacob was angry at Simeon and Levi in particular because they are the ones who did the killing.

KIMHI **25 Two of Jacob's sons.** Even though they had all been in agreement when "speaking with guile" (v. 13), the others begged off out of fear. **Brothers of Dinah.** They were not afraid; they showed themselves to be true brothers. **Unmolested.** Rather, they came "securely"—as securely as if there had been many of them.

26 They . . . took Dinah out of Shechem's house. A midrash says that, out of shame, she refused to leave until Simeon promised he would marry her. This would explain why one of Simeon's sons is called "Saul the son of a Canaanite woman" (46:10).

27 And plundered the town, because their sister had been defiled. More precisely,

NAHMANIDES **23 Their cattle and substance and all their beasts.** Those animals that are in herds are considered a man's "substance" (or, as it is translated elsewhere, his "livestock"). They are the essence of his wealth, whether they are ritually clean animals or not, as we see from Exod. 9:3, "your livestock in the fields—the horses, the asses, the camels, the cattle, and the sheep." But individual animals (e.g., at one's home) are not "livestock," explaining the need to add "all their beasts" here. Or perhaps it is simply emphatic.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **24 All who went out of the gate of his town.** Under the assumption that anyone who went out was trying to avoid being circumcised, no one was permitted to leave until he had been circumcised (Hizkuni).

25 On the third day, when they were in pain. According to Joseph Kara, it would take three days to circumcise them all, so it would take until the third day for all of them to be "in pain" (Bekhor Shor). Hamor proposed marriage immediately, on the very day Shechem lay with Dinah; Shechem circumcised himself on the next day; and all the others were circumcised "on the third day" (Abarbanel). **And slew all the males.** Had they slain only Shechem, the others would eventually have taken revenge for him. They may have acted as if they were coming to tend to them, made sure they were alone with each man, and killed them without the man's wife and children realizing what they had done (Gersonides). Gersonides' suggestion is plausible; there is no question that this was "a little city, with few men in it" (Eccles. 9:14), which is why Simeon and Levi were able to carry out this plan (Abarbanel).

27 Because their sister had been defiled. If this kind of behavior was not acceptable to them, Shechem would never have done

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NJPS and plundered the town, because their sister had been defiled. [28]They seized their flocks and herds and asses, all that was inside the town and outside; [29]all their wealth, all their children, and their wives, all that was in the houses, they took as captives and booty.

[30]Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, "You have brought trouble on me, making me odious among the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites and the Perizzites; my men are few in number, so that if they unite against me and attack me, I and my house will be destroyed." [31]But they answered, "Should our sister be treated like a whore?"

35 God said to Jacob, "Arise, go up to Bethel and remain there; and build an altar there to the God who appeared to you when you were fleeing from your brother

הַחֲלָלִים וַיָּבֹזּוּ הָעִיר אֲשֶׁר טִמְּאוּ אֲחוֹתָם׃ 28 אֶת־צֹאנָם וְאֶת־בְּקָרָם וְאֶת־חֲמֹרֵיהֶם וְאֵת אֲשֶׁר־בָּעִיר וְאֶת־אֲשֶׁר בַּשָּׂדֶה לָקָחוּ׃ 29 וְאֶת־כָּל־חֵילָם וְאֶת־כָּל־טַפָּם וְאֶת־נְשֵׁיהֶם שָׁבוּ וַיָּבֹזּוּ וְאֵת כָּל־אֲשֶׁר בַּבָּיִת׃ 30 וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב אֶל־שִׁמְעוֹן וְאֶל־לֵוִי עֲכַרְתֶּם אֹתִי לְהַבְאִישֵׁנִי בְּיֹשֵׁב הָאָרֶץ בַּכְּנַעֲנִי וּבַפְּרִזִּי וַאֲנִי מְתֵי מִסְפָּר וְנֶאֶסְפוּ עָלַי וְהִכּוּנִי וְנִשְׁמַדְתִּי אֲנִי וּבֵיתִי׃ 31 וַיֹּאמְרוּ הַכְזוֹנָה* יַעֲשֶׂה אֶת־אֲחוֹתֵנוּ׃ פ

לה וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים אֶל־יַעֲקֹב קוּם עֲלֵה בֵית־אֵל וְשֶׁב־שָׁם וַעֲשֵׂה־שָׁם מִזְבֵּחַ לָאֵל הַנִּרְאָה אֵלֶיךָ בְּבָרְחֲךָ מִפְּנֵי עֵשָׂו

v. 31. ז׳ רבתי לפי מהדורת לעטעריס

OJPS came upon the slain, and spoiled the city, because they had defiled their sister. [28]They took their flocks and their herds and their asses, and that which was in the city and that which was in the field; [29]and all their wealth, and all their little ones and their wives, took they captive and spoiled, even all that was in the house.

[30]And Jacob said to Simeon and Levi: "Ye have troubled me, to make me odious unto the inhabitants of the land, even unto the Canaanites and the Perizzites; and, I being few in number, they will gather themselves together against me and smite me; and I shall be destroyed, I and my house." [31]And they said: "Should one deal with our sister as with a harlot?"

35 And God said unto Jacob: "Arise, go up to Beth-el, and dwell there; and make there an altar unto God, who appeared unto thee when thou didst flee from the

RASHI **29 They took as captives.** The accent on the Hebrew verb makes clear that the root is שבה rather than שוב ("they came back").

30 You have brought trouble on me. More precisely, "you have agitated me" (the same root gives us the talmudic phrase "muddy water"). I cannot think clearly right now. — A midrash recounts: The barrel was clear and now you have muddied it. The Canaanites have a tradition that they are to fall before the sons of Jacob, but did nothing about it, thinking it would not happen "until you have increased and possess the land" (Exod. 23:30). Now you have stirred up trouble.

31 Should our sister be treated like a whore? As if she were at anyone's disposal. A more precise translation would be *"made* like a whore." OJPS "with" is incorrect; *et* marks the direct object here.

35:1 Arise, go up to Bethel. This whole affair with your daughter was a punishment for your delay in returning to Bethel.

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ If their purpose was revenge, why did Jacob's sons take "all their wealth, all their children, and their wives . . . as captives and booty" (v. 29)? ✦ How does Simeon and Levi's asking "Should our sister be treated like a whore?" (v. 31) answer Jacob's question, which was why they had to kill anyone but the offender?

✦ Why did Jacob not fulfill his vow until God told him, "Arise, go up to Bethel" (v. 1)? ✦ God also told him "remain there"—but he didn't. Why not? ✦ Jacob was instructed to "build an altar there to the God who appeared to you when you were fleeing from your brother Esau." Why did he alter this instruction when he repeated it in v. 3?

RASHBAM **30 Making me odious.** Literally, "making me stink." Compare the use of the same word in "making us *loathsome*" (Exod. 5:21).

IBN EZRA **29 All that was in the houses.** Rather, "that was in the *house*" (OJPS)—Hamor's house, or Shechem's.

30 Making me odious. They will hate me as one hates something that "stinks," which this word literally means. **My men are few in number.** The Hebrew literally says, "I am men of number"; if the men can be counted, they are indeed few. So Aaron ha-Cohen, one-time head of the Yeshivah of Pumbedita, erred when he took the blessing of Reuben, "may his men be a number" (Deut. 33:6), to mean that they would be a *big* number.

31 They answered. "They," Simeon and Levi. **Should our sister be treated like a whore?** Rather, "Should *he* [that is, Shechem] treat our sister like a whore?"

KIMHI the town "where" their sister had been defiled. Many of the townspeople saw Shechem take her by force, but did not try to stop him.

30 If they unite against me and attack me, I and my house will be destroyed. Jacob was afraid, as usual.

35:1 Arise, go up to Bethel and remain there. An angel appeared to him at Shechem and told him to fulfill his vow. He was to "remain there" only long enough to build a "house of God" as he had promised. What happened to Dinah was his punishment for apparently having decided to remain in Shechem rather than go to Bethel and fulfill the vow; he should have gone directly there, fulfilled

NAHMANIDES **35:1 Remain there; and build an altar there.** I have no idea what is meant by "remain there." Perhaps he was supposed to "settle there" first and then build the altar, in order to cleanse himself first from the impurity of the idols or perhaps of the corpses whom they had slain, as in "You shall then stay outside the camp seven days; every one among you or among your captives who has slain a person or touched a corpse shall cleanse himself" (Num. 31:19). For they had not yet been commanded about the "water of

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS it. Clearly it was a custom among them for the rulers there to seize whomever they wanted, as a wife or as a concubine, like the divine beings of 6:2, who took whatever women they pleased (Sforno).

31 Should our sister be treated like a whore? If Shechem had done this to a whore, he would not be liable for death. Is that what you are saying, that our sister is a whore? (Gersonides). They insisted that they had no choice but to risk an honorable death over a life of disgrace. The Holy One's view of what they did is clear from 35:5. And the whole story is written here to demonstrate how difficult it is to have a daughter. Dinah brought Jacob more trouble than all 12 of his sons put together (Abarbanel).

35:1 Arise, go up to Bethel and remain there. "Settle down there, for you must tithe." The Holy One waited until after the Shechem incident so Jacob could tithe from the spoil they took from the city (Bekhor Shor). He could remain there safely—and he could

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NJPS Esau." [2]So Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, "Rid yourselves of the alien gods in your midst, purify yourselves, and change your clothes. [3]Come, let us go up to Bethel, and I will build an altar there to the God who answered me when I was in distress and who has been with me wherever I have gone." [4]They gave to Jacob all the alien gods that they had, and the rings that were in their ears, and Jacob buried them under the terebinth that was near Shechem. [5]As they set out, a terror from God fell on the cities round about, so that they did not pursue the sons of Jacob.

[6]Thus Jacob came to Luz—that is, Bethel—in the land of Canaan, he and all the people who were with him. [7]There

אָחִיךָ׃ [2] וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב אֶל־בֵּיתוֹ וְאֶל כָּל־
אֲשֶׁר עִמּוֹ הָסִרוּ אֶת־אֱלֹהֵי הַנֵּכָר אֲשֶׁר
בְּתֹכְכֶם וְהִטַּהֲרוּ וְהַחֲלִיפוּ שִׂמְלֹתֵיכֶם׃
[3] וְנָקוּמָה וְנַעֲלֶה בֵּית־אֵל וְאֶעֱשֶׂה־שָּׁם
מִזְבֵּחַ לָאֵל הָעֹנֶה אֹתִי בְּיוֹם צָרָתִי וַיְהִי
עִמָּדִי בַּדֶּרֶךְ אֲשֶׁר הָלָכְתִּי׃ [4] וַיִּתְּנוּ אֶל־
יַעֲקֹב אֶת כָּל־אֱלֹהֵי הַנֵּכָר אֲשֶׁר בְּיָדָם
וְאֶת־הַנְּזָמִים אֲשֶׁר בְּאָזְנֵיהֶם וַיִּטְמֹן אֹתָם
יַעֲקֹב תַּחַת הָאֵלָה אֲשֶׁר עִם־שְׁכֶם׃
[5] וַיִּסָּעוּ וַיְהִי | חִתַּת אֱלֹהִים עַל־הֶעָרִים
אֲשֶׁר סְבִיבוֹתֵיהֶם וְלֹא רָדְפוּ אַחֲרֵי בְּנֵי
יַעֲקֹב׃
[6] וַיָּבֹא יַעֲקֹב לוּזָה אֲשֶׁר בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנַעַן הִוא
בֵּית־אֵל הִוא וְכָל־הָעָם אֲשֶׁר־עִמּוֹ׃ [7] וַיִּבֶן

OJPS face of Esau thy brother." [2]Then Jacob said unto his household, and to all that were with him: "Put away the strange gods that are among you, and purify yourselves, and change your garments; [3]and let us arise, and go up to Beth-el; and I will make there an altar unto God, who answered me in the day of my distress, and was with me in the way which I went." [4]And they gave unto Jacob all the foreign gods which were in their hand, and the rings which were in their ears; and Jacob hid them under the terebinth which was by Shechem. [5]And they journeyed; and a terror of God was upon the cities that were round about them, and they did not pursue after the sons of Jacob.

[6]So Jacob came to Luz, which is in the land of Canaan—the same is Beth-el—he and all the people that were with him. [7]And

RASHI **2 The alien gods in your midst.** Which you took in spoil from Shechem. **Purify yourselves.** Of idolatry. **And change your clothes.** Some of which may have been previously used as coverings for idols.

4 The terebinth. This is a non-fruit-bearing kind of tree.

RASHBAM **35:2 The alien gods.** Which they had gotten in the city.

IBN EZRA **35:2 Rid yourselves of the alien gods.** God forbid that the prophet should be sleeping with women who serve alien gods. See my comment to Deut. 31:16. **[F] Purify yourselves.** That is, bathe. **And change your clothes.** This is the place where we learn that when Jews pray (in a location set aside for that purpose) their bodies and clothes must be clean.

[F] In a later comment, recorded in London by his student Joseph b. Jacob of Morville, Ibn Ezra reminds us that Rachel had stolen her father's gods, which she presumably continued to worship up to this point.

KIMHI his vow, and then gone straight to his father's house. We explained it differently in our comment to 32:26, but this explanation is also correct. **When you were fleeing from your brother.** Remember that you were on your own and on the run when He made those promises to you.

2 To his household. His children. **And to all who were with him.** His manservants and maidservants. **Rid yourselves of the alien gods in your midst.** Among the gold and silver objects they had taken there was jewelry with idolatrous images. All they wanted to do was melt them down, but Jacob did not want anyone benefiting in any way from idolatry. Moses himself would later write, "You shall not covet the silver and gold on them and keep it for yourselves" (Deut. 7:25). **Purify yourselves.** Idols convey impurity. **And change your clothes.** Which had also become impure. Or perhaps these were clothes they had taken from the slain, or from their houses.

4 Jacob buried them. He did not simply abandon them, not wanting them to tempt anyone who might find them.

6 Luz . . . in the land of Canaan. This tells us that there was another Luz. **He and all the people who were with him.** They had lost no one, either on the journey or at Shechem.

NAHMANIDES purification" (Num. 8:7). But either Jacob made sure to cleanse himself even before he arrived there, or what he tells them in vv. 2–3 actually was performed in reverse order. Alternatively, perhaps God commanded him to "remain there" in order to clear his mind in preparation for cleaving to God.

4 Jacob buried them. Idols and their accouterments are not supposed to be buried, but ground up and scattered to the wind or cast into the water. But it seems to me that Jacob's sons would not have taken any idol from Shechem unless it had been profaned, at which point it became permissible. For according to Jewish law, an idolater can be forced to desacralize his idol. But even though the alien "gods" were no longer forbidden objects, Jacob told his household to rid themselves of them so that his household would be worthy of serving the Holy One and of bringing offerings to Him. This would explain why he told them to "purify yourselves, and change your clothes" (v. 2). So burying the alien gods would have been enough. **Under the terebinth.** A place "which is not tilled or sown" (Deut. 21:4).

6 He and all the people who were with him. **[N]**

[N] See the end of Nahmanides' comment to 34:13.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS not remain where he was. There is no implication that he had not fulfilled his vow to tithe; that did not come into effect until "I return safe to my father's house" (28:21). But our Sages say that the Holy One was hinting to him that his record was being reviewed (Abarbanel). Stay there long enough to focus your thoughts properly before you build the altar. As the Sages tell us, in ancient times the pious would wait an hour before praying in order to properly focus their thoughts on the Holy One (Sforno).

2 Rid yourselves of the alien gods. For they were on their way to a sacred location (Gersonides).

3 When I was in distress. On the day Simeon and Levi killed the men of Shechem (Abarbanel).

4 The rings that were in their ears. That is, in the ears of the alien gods (Bekhor Shor). The Golden Calf was also made from "the gold rings that were in their ears" (Exod. 32:3), and according to Judg. 8:24–27 so was the ephod that Gideon made (Gersonides).

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NJPS he built an altar and named the site El-bethel, for it was there that God had revealed Himself to him when he was fleeing from his brother.

[8]Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, died, and was buried under the oak below Bethel; so it was named Allon-bacuth.

שָׁם֙ מִזְבֵּ֔חַ וַיִּקְרָ֕א לַמָּק֖וֹם אֵ֣ל בֵּ֣ית־אֵ֑ל כִּ֣י שָׁ֗ם נִגְל֤וּ אֵלָיו֙ הָאֱלֹהִ֔ים בְּבָרְח֖וֹ מִפְּנֵ֥י אָחִֽיו׃

8 וַתָּ֙מָת֙ דְּבֹרָ֣ה מֵינֶ֔קֶת רִבְקָ֖ה וַתִּקָּבֵ֣ר מִתַּ֣חַת לְבֵית־אֵ֑ל תַּ֚חַת הָאַלּ֔וֹן וַיִּקְרָ֥א שְׁמ֖וֹ אַלּ֥וֹן בָּכֽוּת׃ פ

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why does the information that "Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, died, and was buried" (v. 8) interrupt the narrative, and why at just that point? ✦ Why was the oak named Allon-bacuth, "the oak of weeping"? She must have been quite old already. And the text has not told us anything about her. So why all the weeping?

RASHI **7 El-bethel.** Rather, "God (El) is *in* Bethel," that is, the Holy One is in Bethel, the Shekhinah is in Bethel. The preposition *be-* is sometimes intended even when it is missing from the word; see the Hebrew of "Is there room *in* your father's house for us to spend the night?" (24:23) and "He is *in* the house of Machir" (2 Sam. 9:4). **God had revealed Himself to him.** The verb is plural here, as often when divinity or lordship is involved. For examples, see the Hebrew of "Joseph's *master*" (39:20); "if its *owner* was with it" (Exod. 22:14). You also find the word *elohim* (with plural ending), which elsewhere means "God," used even for a human judge or ruler. None of the other divine names takes the plural form.

8 Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, died. What was she doing in Jacob's household? Rebekah had told him to stay with Laban until Esau's anger subsided: "Then I will fetch you from there" (27:45). It was Deborah whom she sent to fetch him from Paddan-aram. But she died on the trip home. I learned this from the words of Moses ha-Darshan. **Under the oak below Bethel.** Rather, "beneath the plateau below Bethel." The city was on top of a mountain, and she was buried at the foot of the mountain. She was buried on the slope beneath the Oak Plateau on which Bethel was built. A midrash: Jacob got some other bad news there too, for he was told that his mother had died. (The word *allon*—"oak" in the translations—means "other" in Greek.) The family had kept quiet about her death so that people would not curse the belly from which Esau had come. Under the circumstances, the text too did not wish to publicize it.

OJPS he built there an altar, and called the place El-beth-el, because there God was revealed unto him, when he fled from the face of his brother.

[8]And Deborah Rebekah's nurse died, and she was buried below Beth-el under the oak; and the name of it was called Allon-bacuth.

RASHBAM **7 And named the site.** This site was outside Luz, where he had set up a pillar when he originally left his father. **El-bethel.** He had previously "named that site Bethel" (28:19), meaning that he had renamed the city of Luz. Now he renamed the site where he had had the dream, outside the city, El-bethel. For God had been at his aid ever since.

8 Allon-bacuth. The name is given because the text lists the names of all the places Jacob came to on his journey home: Penuel, Succoth, El-elohe-yisrael, Salem the city of Shechem (see 33:18), Luz, El-bethel, Allon-bacuth, Bethel #2 after "God appeared again to Jacob" (v. 9) there, Ephrath/Bethlehem, and Migdal-eder.

IBN EZRA **7 It was there that God had revealed Himself to him.** Rather—since the verb is plural—"it was there that the divine beings [the "angels of God" in 28:12] had revealed themselves to him."

KIMHI **7 There he built an altar.** At the "house of God" that he built, as promised (and as we have explained)—though the "house" is not mentioned here. **God had revealed Himself.** The verb employs a plural of majesty, as in the Hebrew of "Let Israel rejoice in its *maker*" (Ps. 149:2); "Where is my God, my *Maker*?" (Job 35:10); and similar phrases.

NAHMANIDES **8 Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, died.** I don't know why this verse interrupts vv. 7 and 9, which recount something that occurred at a single time in a single place. Why stick this verse in the middle of it? It is reasonable to assume (as our Sages said) that this verse is hinting at the death of Rebekah herself. That would explain the name Allon-bacuth ("Oak of Weeping"); there would hardly be so much weeping and moaning over the death of Rebekah's old nurse as to justify naming the place after her. Rather, Jacob was weeping and mourning for his mother, that righteous woman who had loved him and sent him far away and did not manage to live long enough to see him return. That is why God appeared to him and blessed him (v. 9), just as "after the death of Abraham, God blessed his son Isaac" (25:11). In both cases, the Sages say this was the Mourner's Blessing. **[O]** The fact that in v. 27 "Jacob came to his father Isaac" and not to his mother Rebekah as well lends support to this idea; had she been there, she would certainly have been mentioned. As for Rashi's comment (taken from rabbinic literature), note that Leah's death is not mentioned either. What the Sages are pointing out is that Rebekah's death *is* alluded to, albeit in this roundabout way. In any case, why would anyone curse Rebekah more than Isaac, whose death is mentioned in v. 29? It may be that unlike Isaac, who was buried by Esau and Jacob, Rebekah was buried without honor; Jacob was not around, and Esau hated her and certainly would not have gone there. As for Isaac, "his eyes were too dim" (27:1) for him to leave the house. The text did not want to mention that Rebekah was buried by the Hittites. I have found essentially the same explanation in Deuteronomy Rabbah (which notes that "bacuth" can also be read as *bacoth*, "weepings" in the plural). They mentioned the potential for her to be cursed because according to that version Esau was the only one present at her burial (which took place at night). As for Deborah, remember that she had originally come to Canaan with Rebekah from Paddan-aram: "So they sent off their sister Rebekah and her nurse along with Abraham's servant and his men" (24:59). Eventually she returned home, but now she had been returning to Canaan with him to see her old mistress. Or perhaps she was among his household because she was raising Jacob's children too, out of her love for Rebekah. But conceivably this was not even the nurse who had been sent to Canaan with her, but another who had nursed her earlier, before she left, who remained in Laban's house. Jacob would have been bringing her along to care for his mother in her old age. People of high status have many nurses. Moses ha-Darshan's idea that Rebekah had sent such an old woman to fetch Jacob back from Paddan-aram is hardly plausible.

[O] This blessing fell out of use and is no longer known.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **7 And named the site.** Literally, "the place" (OJPS), the same inn he had stayed at in 28:11, when he "came upon a certain *place*" (Sforno). **El-bethel.** Rashi's explanation is correct; but I think it is more correct to say that Jacob "called out" in a loud voice that this was Bethel, the place of God (Abarbanel).

8 Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, died. If any death were decreed to fall upon Jacob's household, this took care of it all (Abarbanel). This interrupted the revelation to him of the Shekhinah (Sforno).

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NJPS 9God appeared again to Jacob on his arrival from Paddan-aram, and He blessed him. 10God said to him,

"You whose name is Jacob,
You shall be called Jacob no more,
But Israel shall be your name."
Thus He named him Israel.

11And God said to him,

"I am El Shaddai.
Be fertile and increase;
A nation, yea an assembly of nations,
Shall descend from you.
Kings shall issue from your loins.

12The land that I assigned to Abraham and Isaac
I assign to you;
And to your offspring to come
Will I assign the land."

9 וַיֵּרָ֛א אֱלֹהִ֥ים אֶל־יַעֲקֹ֖ב עֹ֑וד בְּבֹא֗וֹ מִפַּדַּן
אֲרָ֔ם וַיְבָ֥רֶךְ אֹתֹֽו׃ 10 וַיֹּ֨אמֶר־לֹ֜ו אֱלֹהִ֗ים
שִׁמְךָ֣ יַעֲקֹ֔ב
לֹֽא־יִקָּרֵ֥א שִׁמְךָ֖ עֹ֣וד יַעֲקֹ֑ב
כִּ֚י אִם־יִשְׂרָאֵ֣ל יִהְיֶ֔ה שְׁמֶ֖ךָ
וַיִּקְרָ֥א אֶת־שְׁמֹ֖ו יִשְׂרָאֵֽל׃
11 וַיֹּ֨אמֶר֙ לֹ֣ו אֱלֹהִ֔ים
אֵ֥ל שַׁדָּ֖י
פְּרֵ֣ה וּרְבֵ֑ה
גֹּ֤וי וּקְהַל־גֹּויִם֙
יִהְיֶ֣ה מִמֶּ֔ךָּ
וּמְלָכִ֖ים מֵחֲלָצֶ֥יךָ יֵצֵֽאוּ׃ ששי
12 וְאֶת־הָאָ֗רֶץ אֲשֶׁ֤ר נָתַ֙תִּי֙ לְאַבְרָהָ֣ם
וּלְיִצְחָ֔ק
לְךָ֥ אֶתְּנֶ֖נָּה
וּלְזַרְעֲךָ֣ אַחֲרֶ֑יךָ
אֶתֵּ֖ן אֶת־הָאָֽרֶץ׃

OJPS 9And God appeared unto Jacob again, when he came from Paddan-aram, and blessed him. 10And God said unto him:

"Thy name is Jacob:
thy name shall not be called any more Jacob,
but Israel shall be thy name";
and He called his name Israel.

11And God said unto him:

"I am God Almighty.
Be fruitful and multiply;
a nation and a company of nations
shall be of thee,
and kings shall come out of thy loins;

12and the land which I gave unto Abraham and Isaac,
to thee I will give it,
and to thy seed after thee
will I give the land."

RASHI **9 God appeared again to Jacob.** For a second time in the same location, once when he left and now again when he returned. **And He blessed him.** With the blessing recited in the presence of a mourner. **[L]**

10 You shall be called Jacob no more. A name that implies cunning (*acob*) and secretiveness. **But Israel shall be your name.** A name describing a leader (*sar*) and ruler. **[M]**

11 I am El Shaddai. I am *El she-dai*, "the Power that is [great] enough" to grant blessing—for all blessings are Mine. **Be fertile and increase.** He could still fulfill this commandment, for Benjamin had not yet been born (though Rachel was already pregnant with him). **A nation.** Benjamin. **Yea an assembly of nations.** Manasseh and Ephraim, who were yet to come forth—from Joseph, but still to be counted among the 12 tribes of Israel. **Kings shall issue from your loins.** Saul and his son Ish-bosheth, who were both from the tribe of Benjamin. In fact, Abner was acting on precisely this interpretation of the verse when he made Ish-bosheth king. **[N]**

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why are we told that God appeared to Jacob "on his arrival from Paddan-aram" (v. 9) and not "at Bethel"? For that matter, we are not actually told where this appearance took place. ✦ Why does God "bless" him by saying, "You whose name is Jacob, you shall be called Jacob no more, but Israel shall be your name" (v. 10), when the angel has already given Jacob that blessing in 32:29? ✦ How was "Be fertile and increase; a nation, yea an assembly of nations, shall descend from you" (v. 11) fulfilled, when no one yet remained to be born to Jacob but Benjamin? ✦ How can He tell Jacob that He is giving him the land (as v. 12 literally says) and not actually give it to him?

RASHBAM **9 God appeared again to Jacob.** After Jacob left Luz/Bethel, God appeared again to him at a second location, which Jacob also named Bethel (see v. 15).

IBN EZRA **10 You shall be called Jacob no more.** Not exclusively. **But Israel shall be your name.** As well.

11 Be fertile and increase. Not a commandment, but a blessing; see 1:22.

KIMHI **10 He named him Israel.** This is how He "blessed him" (v. 9).

11 I am El Shaddai. See my comment to the same phrase in 17:1. **Be fertile and increase.** This was a blessing for his descendants; Jacob would father no more children after this vision; Benjamin's mother was already pregnant with him. **Kings shall issue from your loins.** Could the righteous Abner have disputed David's kingship? **[A]** But apparently he interpreted "kings shall issue" to mean that Israel would have at least two kings descended from Benjamin, who was yet to be born at this point.

[A] See Rashi's comment.

[L] This blessing, mentioned in rabbinic sources, is no longer known. **[M]** The previous comment suggests that "Israel" also implies that he will no longer need to be crooked but can be straight (*yashar*). **[N]** See 2 Samuel 2.

NAHMANIDES **10 You whose name is Jacob.** And who are still called by that name, despite being renamed by Esau's angel. For his mission was not to change your name. **Thus He named him Israel.** This was the moment at which Jacob's name was actually changed. Or it may be possible to understand "You whose name is Jacob" to mean that Israel was an additional name. It was not forbidden to call him Jacob.

12 The land that I assigned to Abraham and Isaac I assign to you. And in the same way—by swearing an oath. That is the implication of the phrase. The land had originally been assigned to Jacob without such an oath, but now, as with his father and grandfather, the implication was that the land would be assigned to him whether or not he might subsequently sin. We see that the land was assigned

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **9 God appeared again to Jacob.** After the weeping of v. 8 was over (Sforno). **On his arrival from Paddan-aram.** He had never appeared to him while in Paddan-aram but simply spoken to him through an angel (Sforno). **He blessed him.** Now that he had fulfilled his vow (Bekhor Shor).

10 Israel shall be your name. Along with Jacob. "Abram" was changed to "Abraham," so the earlier version could no longer be used; but "Israel" was added to "Jacob" (Bekhor Shor). Getting rid of "Jacob" entirely would have been an admission that Esau was explaining the name correctly when he said, in 27:36, "Was he, then, named Jacob that he might supplant me these two times?" (Hizkuni). Jacob would now be his ordinary name; Israel, the name connected with the angel, would take precedence (Abarbanel). Some of the implications of the name Israel would begin to take effect even now (Sforno).

11 Be fertile and increase. This is the only time such a command is given to an individual (Masorah).

12 And to your offspring to come will I assign the land. Jacob, unlike Abraham and Isaac, is given the promise that all of his sons

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NJPS [13]God parted from him at the spot where He had spoken to him; [14]and Jacob set up a pillar at the site where He had spoken to him, a pillar of stone, and he offered a libation on it and poured oil upon it. [15]Jacob gave the site, where God had spoken to him, the name of Bethel.

[16]They set out from Bethel; but when they were still some distance short of Ephrath, Rachel was in childbirth, and she

OJPS [13]And God went up from him in the place where He spoke with him. [14]And Jacob set up a pillar in the place where He spoke with him, a pillar of stone, and he poured out a drink-offering thereon, and poured oil thereon. [15]And Jacob called the name of the place where God spoke with him, Beth-el.

[16]And they journeyed from Beth-el; and there was still some way to come to Ephrath; and Rachel travailed, and she had

13 וַיַּ֖עַל מֵעָלָ֑יו אֱלֹהִ֖ים בַּמָּקוֹם֙ אֲשֶׁר־דִּבֶּ֣ר
אִתּ֔וֹ׃ 14 וַיַּצֵּ֤ב יַעֲקֹב֙ מַצֵּבָ֔ה בַּמָּקוֹם֙ אֲשֶׁר־
דִּבֶּ֥ר אִתּ֖וֹ מַצֶּ֣בֶת אָ֑בֶן וַיַּסֵּ֥ךְ עָלֶ֖יהָ נֶ֣סֶךְ
וַיִּצֹ֥ק עָלֶ֖יהָ שָֽׁמֶן׃ 15 וַיִּקְרָ֣א יַעֲקֹ֔ב אֶת־שֵׁ֕ם
הַמָּק֖וֹם אֲשֶׁר֙ דִּבֶּ֣ר אִתּ֔וֹ שָׁ֖ם אֱלֹהִ֑ים
בֵּֽית־אֵ֔ל׃
16 וַיִּסְעוּ֙ מִבֵּ֣ית אֵ֔ל וַיְהִי־ע֥וֹד כִּבְרַת־
הָאָ֖רֶץ לָבֹ֣וא אֶפְרָ֑תָה וַתֵּ֥לֶד רָחֵ֖ל וַתְּקַשׁ

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why are we told, for this prophecy and no other of Jacob's prophecies, that "God parted from him" (v. 13)? He obviously parted from him after the other prophecies too. ✦ What need was there to mention that this took place "at the spot where He had spoken to him"? ✦ Why must Jacob give the site "the name of Bethel" when he has already done so in 28:19?

RASHI **13 At the spot where He had spoken to him.** I don't know what this is supposed to teach us.

16 Some distance short. Menahem connects the Hebrew word *kibrah* with *kabbir* ("mighty"), implying that this was a *long* way away, "quite some distance." A midrash explains that this was the season when the ground was like a *kebarah* ("a sieve"), the ground being bare—after the rains had ceased, before the hot weather arrived. But this is not the straightforward sense of the text, since we read the same expression in the story of Naaman: "When he had gone some distance" (2 Kings 5:19). I think it is a word for a specific measure of land, perhaps a league or so. Just as 33:19

RASHBAM **15 The site where God had spoken to him.** The same expression occurs several times in this passage. The implication is that such sites were found somewhere along the road, not in a location where there was a town.

16 Some distance short. Quite a long distance; compare the related words in "their *vast* populations" (Isa. 10:13) and

IBN EZRA **14 And Jacob set up a pillar.** Or perhaps "Jacob had set up a pillar" on his first visit. It may of course possibly mean that he set up a second one now, but I find the first possibility more plausible. **He offered a libation on it.** Of water or wine. But the Hebrew says merely that he "poured [something] out" on it (see OJPS); this was to wash it off. **And poured oil upon it.** Having washed it first. It was also here at Bethel that he fulfilled his vow of 28:22, tithing his wealth (in honor of the Holy One) to someone in that generation who was worthy of receiving it.

16 Some distance short. Possibly *kibrat* is not a noun, but a prepositional phrase: "about a *barat*," the latter being an official measure of distance (though there is

KIMHI **13 God parted from him.** The Hebrew uses essentially the same language as in "God was gone from Abraham" (17:22; compare OJPS to both). His vision included a vision of the departure. **At the spot where He had spoken to him.** This was the very spot where Jacob "would meet him, there to commune with him" (Hosea 12:5), the same spot from which the Holy One would "part" when Jeroboam set up a golden calf there. **[B]**

16 Some distance short. The *barah* as a measure of distance is derived from the verb *barah* as in "nor would he *partake* of food with them" (2 Sam. 12:17); it is just a "bite" of

[B] See 1 Kings 12.

NAHMANIDES to Jacob by oath just as to the others by the expressions used subsequently throughout the text, e.g., "the land of which I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying, 'To your offspring will I give it'" (Exod. 33:1). Or it may simply be that this repetition of the prophecy is the equivalent of swearing; see my comment to 26:3.

13 God parted from him. Just as "God was gone from Abraham" (17:22), and using the same Hebrew expression in both places. This lets us know that these were not merely prophetic visions or dreams or like what happened to Ezekiel, when "a spirit lifted me up between heaven and earth and brought me in visions of God to Jerusalem" (Ezek. 8:3). Rather, the Shekhinah rested upon Jacob (as upon Abraham) in that spot where he actually stood. **At the spot where He had spoken to him.** According to the Way of Truth, this should be read: "as the Place who spoke with him." It is comparable to "blessed is the Presence of the LORD, in His place" (Ezek. 3:12). **[P]** Thus it is saying what the Sages have remarked: "The Patriarchs *are* the Chariot."

14 Jacob set up a pillar. Ibn Ezra's comment is correct.

15 Jacob gave the site, where God had spoken to him, the name of Bethel. He "called" it (OJPS) by this name time and again, to make known that this was most truly and certainly a house of God and that the Shekhinah was always there. The same explanation holds true for the repetitive naming of Beer-sheba. **[Q]**

16 Some distance short. See Rashi's comment; but the correct explanation is that given by Kimhi, except that *barah* refers only to eating just a "bite" of breakfast; our expression, therefore, refers to the distance one can travel in between this first brief snack and the noon meal. Travelers, after all, measure distance in increments of time. — This at least is what I wrote at first. But now that I have managed to visit Jerusalem (praise to God who is good and does good) I have seen with my own eyes that it is not even a mile from Rachel's Tomb to Bethlehem. So both this explanation and that of Menahem are disproven. As Rashi says, it must be the name of a measure, but most likely the כ is indeed a preposition: "about a *barah*." If *barah* is descriptive and not just a name, perhaps it is related to the Aramaic word for "daughter," implying a small measure, the "daughter" of (i.e., smaller than) a league or some other measure of length that was used in those days. It would be the smallest standard measure of travel distances, as the mile is today. I would add that I saw no gravesite in Ramah or anywhere nearby. The Ramah in Benjamin is at least four leagues distant from it, and the Ramah in Mount Ephraim is more

[P] "Place" is a rabbinic name for God. **[Q]** See 21:31 and 26:33.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS will inherit the land (Abarbanel). Not "the land" but "the earth." At the end of days the whole earth will belong to your offspring, when (as 28:14 puts it) "you shall spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south" (Sforno).

13 God parted from him at the spot where He had spoken to him. To prevent him asking, "O Lord GOD, how shall I know that I am to possess it?" as Abram had in 15:8. The Holy One did not want to reveal any more just now. As for "the spot where He had spoken to him," that is not saying where God parted from him but telling us that this communication took place at the same spot where He had spoken to him where he had had the original vision on his way to Aram (Abarbanel).

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NJPS had hard labor. 17When her labor was at its hardest, the midwife said to her, "Have no fear, for it is another boy for you." 18But as she breathed her last—for she was dying—she named him Ben-oni; but his father called him Benjamin. 19Thus Rachel died. She was buried on the road to

בְּלִדְתָּהּ׃ 17 וַיְהִי בְהַקְשֹׁתָהּ בְּלִדְתָּהּ
וַתֹּאמֶר לָהּ הַמְיַלֶּדֶת אַל־תִּירְאִי כִּי־גַם־
זֶה לָךְ בֵּן׃ 18 וַיְהִי בְּצֵאת נַפְשָׁהּ כִּי מֵתָה
וַתִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ בֶּן־אוֹנִי וְאָבִיו קָרָא־לוֹ
בִנְיָמִין׃ 19 וַתָּמָת רָחֵל וַתִּקָּבֵר בְּדֶרֶךְ

OJPS hard labor. 17And it came to pass, when she was in hard labor, that the mid-wife said unto her: "Fear not; for this also is a son for thee." 18And it came to pass, as her soul was in departing—for she died—that she called his name Ben-oni; but his father called him Benjamin. 19And Rachel died, and was buried in the way to Ephrath—the

RASHI describes a "parcel" of land by calling it an allotment, and as Isa. 5:10 describes an acre as the amount of land a yoke of oxen can plow, so too a *kibrah* is a particular distance that was equal to a certain amount of walking.

17 It is another boy for you. In addition to Joseph. Our Sages, however, explain that each of the tribes was born with a female twin, but Benjamin was born with "another" one, a second one, in addition to the one that each of the sons was born with.

18 Ben-oni. "Son of my affliction." **Benjamin.** It seems to me this name must mean "son of the south." When one comes from Aram-naharaim, Canaan is to the south; and indeed, though *yamin* elsewhere means "right" (as opposed to "left"), we find it used for "south" as well: "North and *south*—You created them" (Ps. 89:13). "Benjamin" is spelled fully here, with a second י, to point to this meaning.

KIMHI distance. **She had hard labor.** Despite the verb's being a Piel, it is intransitive. If it is transitive, "the birth" itself must be the subject that is "causing" the difficult labor.

17 Have no fear, for it is another boy for you. So be strong.

18 For she was dying. And knew it; she had no hope of living. **Benjamin.** "Son of the right hand," that is, beloved because born in his old age: "Grant Your help to the man at Your right hand, the one You have taken as Your own" (Ps. 80:18).

NAHMANIDES than two days away. So the "cry is heard in Ramah" of "Rachel weeping for her children" (Jer. 31:15) must be an image of Rachel weeping so loudly that her cry could be heard as far away as Ramah (the one belonging to her son Benjamin). She was "weeping for her children . . . who are gone" (Jer. 31:15), and she is bereft of them. The verse does not say that Rachel was weeping for them *in* Ramah, but that the sound could be heard there. As to why Jacob buried her on the road and did not bring her into Bethlehem, which was so close by—he saw by means of the Holy Spirit that it would be part of the territory of Judah, and he did not want to bury her there, but in the territory of her own son Benjamin. And indeed the road where Rachel's Tomb is located is near Bethel in the territory of Benjamin. Citing 48:7, the Sifrei to Deut. 33:12 says explicitly that she died in the territory of Benjamin. Jonathan b. Uzziel's Aramaic translation of Jer. 31:15 noticed this as well, and translated Ramah literally as "on high," explicating that verse as referring to the Assembly of Israel. **[R]**

RASHBAM *"mighty* men without number" (Job 34:24). Because there was "quite some distance" to go before they reached Ephrath, she was buried along the road.

17 Have no fear, for it is another boy for you. Just as you prayed, "May the LORD add another son for me" (30:24). The Lord is not trying to kill you; He accepted your prayer. (She was trying to make her feel better.)

18 Benjamin. That is, *ben yamim* ("son of days," a son of old age). For the shift between *n* and *m* in this word, compare "at the end of the days [*yamin*]" (Dan. 12:13).

IBN EZRA no example of it without the ב anywhere in the Bible). **[G]**

17 When her labor was at its hardest. The Hebrew uses a Hiphil, implying that the birth endangered her life. The Piel form in v. 16 has a similar implication. **[H] Have no fear, for it is another boy for you.** It would make her happy to know the child was a boy.

18 Ben-oni. Son of my mourning. Compare "I have not eaten of it while in mourning" (Deut. 26:14) and "It shall be for them like the food of mourners" (Hosea 9:4).

[G] A switch of two Hebrew letters would change "official" to "walking," as in Rashi's comment. **[H]** See Special Topics, "Biblical Hebrew."

18 Ben-oni. Son of my affliction. **Benjamin.** I do not understand Rashi's comment about the land of Israel being south of Aram-naharaim. Aram is *east* of Israel; remember that "Jacob resumed his journey and came to the land of the Easterners" (29:1). Balaam too said, "From Aram has Balak brought me, Moab's king from the hills of the East" (Num. 23:7). Jacob crossed over the Jordan, which is to the east of Israel, and was returning via Edom, which is to the south of Israel, meaning that Aram is southeast of Israel. Israel is farther *north*. Bethlehem is indeed in the south of Israel, but Benjamin was born north of that, between Bethlehem and Bethel. If he was born in Mount Ephraim, that is certainly in the north of Israel: "the house of Joseph shall remain by its territory in the north" (Josh. 18:5), but even if he was born in the territory of Benjamin, that too is not in the south: "The boundary [of the Benjaminites] on their northern rim began at the Jordan; the boundary ascended to the northern flank of Jericho" (Josh. 18:12). Either way, it makes no sense to call him "son of the south." What I think is that his mother intended *oni* to mean "my affliction," but his father turned it into *oni*, "my strength," as in "My might and first fruit of my *vigor*" (49:3); "Fresh *vigor* to the spent" (Isa. 40:29). For the right hand (*yamin*) symbolizes strength and success: "Your right hand overpowers Your foes" (Ps. 21:9); "The right hand of the LORD is exalted! The right hand of the LORD is triumphant!" (Ps. 118:16); "A wise man's mind tends toward the right hand" (Eccles. 10:2). That is, Jacob fully intended to call him by the name his mother gave him, as is normally done, but he translated the name into a more favorable one. I don't know what Genesis Rabbah means by saying that Benjamin is Hebrew for Ben-oni—both names are Hebrew, like the names of all of Jacob's sons—but they are alluding to what I have said, that Jacob put a good spin on the name.

[R] Kabbalistically, the "Assembly of Israel" refers to the Shekhinah.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **17 Have no fear.** Have no fear that such hard labor means [as our tradition says] that it is a girl (Sforno). **For it is another boy for you.** In Hebrew, these are five two-letter words in a row, something that happens only six times in the Bible (Masorah).

18 She was dying. Just when Jacob had received all that blessing. For nothing in this world can be perfectly good (Abarbanel). **His father called him Benjamin.** Despite Rashi, Babylonia really is north of Israel; as Jer. 1:14 warned, "From the north shall disaster break loose" (Bekhor Shor). Jacob did not want his only son born inside the holy land to have an unlucky name (Abarbanel).

19 She was buried on the road to Ephrath. Since she had died in labor, Jacob was afraid she had soiled herself with blood; so he did not want to bring her to the cave of Machpelah (Hizkuni). As 1 Sam. 10:2 proves, her grave was still there in Saul's day. In fact, many people have told us that it is still there (Gersonides).

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NJPS Ephrath—now Bethlehem. [20]Over her grave Jacob set up a pillar; it is the pillar at Rachel's grave to this day. [21]Israel journeyed on, and pitched his tent beyond Migdal-eder.

[22]While Israel stayed in that land, Reuben went and lay with Bilhah, his father's concubine; and Israel found out.

Now the sons of Jacob were twelve in number. [23]The sons of Leah: Reuben—Jacob's first-born—Simeon, Levi, Judah,

OJPS same is Beth-lehem. [20]And Jacob set up a pillar upon her grave; the same is the pillar of Rachel's grave unto this day. [21]And Israel journeyed, and spread his tent beyond Migdal-eder.

[22]And it came to pass, while Israel dwelt in that land, that Reuben went and lay with Bilhah his father's concubine; and Israel heard of it.

Now the sons of Jacob were twelve: [23]the sons of Leah: Reuben, Jacob's first-born, and Simeon, and Levi, and Judah,

אֶפְרָתָה הִוא בֵּית לָחֶם׃ 20 וַיַּצֵּב יַעֲקֹב
מַצֵּבָה עַל־קְבֻרָתָהּ הִוא מַצֶּבֶת קְבֶרֶת־
רָחֵל עַד־הַיּוֹם׃ 21 וַיִּסַּע יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיֵּט אהלה
אָהֳלוֹ מֵהָלְאָה לְמִגְדַּל־עֵדֶר׃
22 וַיְהִי בִּשְׁכֹּן יִשְׂרָאֵל בָּאָרֶץ הַהִוא וַיֵּלֶךְ
רְאוּבֵן וַיִּשְׁכַּב אֶת־בִּלְהָה פִּילֶגֶשׁ אָבִיו
וַיִּשְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל* פ
וַיִּהְיוּ בְנֵי־יַעֲקֹב שְׁנֵים עָשָׂר׃ 23 בְּנֵי לֵאָה
בְּכֹור יַעֲקֹב רְאוּבֵן וְשִׁמְעוֹן וְלֵוִי וִיהוּדָה

v. 22. למדינחאי סוף פסוק, ולמערבאי פיסקא באמצע פסוק

RASHI **22 While Israel stayed in that land.** All this happened to him before he got to Isaac at Hebron. **Reuben went and lay with Bilhah.** He merely moved his father's bed from Bilhah's tent to his mother Leah's; but the text punished him for this by writing that he "bedded" Bilhah, as if he had lain with her. And why did Reuben do that? When Rachel died, Jacob took the special bed he had kept in her tent and in no other and put it in Bilhah's tent. Reuben came and took offense on his mother's behalf: "Even if my mother's sister could be a rival wife to her, should my mother's sister's *maidservant* be one too?" That is why he moved it. **Now the sons of Jacob were twelve in number.** This resumes the earlier narrative: once Benjamin was born, "the bed was complete" and Jacob's full complement of sons could now be counted—and the text does so. Our Sages say the phrase is here to teach us that all 12 sons were equal, and all were righteous. That is, Reuben did *not* sin.

23 Jacob's first-born. Even after his misbehavior he is identified as the first-born—the first with regard to inheritance, the first with regard to service of God, the first when

KIMHI **21 Israel journeyed on.** Toward his father's house.

22 While Israel stayed in that land. He would not stay permanently anywhere until he had gone back to his father's house. But his livestock and retainers were so numerous that he could only travel extremely slowly, so slowly that sometimes he seemed to be staying put. **Reuben went and lay with Bilhah.** He "went" to her tent and lay with her. **His father's concubine.** His father's wife is called "concubine" here because Reuben thought that her origin as a maidservant meant that she was not forbidden to him. But the text clearly tells us that Rachel "gave him her maid Bilhah *as wife*" (30:4, despite NJPS; see OJPS). She was thus forbidden to him; even the Noahide laws forbid this as incest, and Jacob's sons should be forbidden it all the more so. That is why Jacob took away Reuben's first-born status (see 49:4) and gave it to Joseph. **And Israel found out. Now the sons of Jacob were twelve in number.** Once Jacob found out, he separated from her; that is why his sons "were twelve in number" and no more. In fact, he gave up women and all other earthly things at this point, devoting himself to God's service, thereby fulfilling his promise that "the LORD shall be my God" (28:21).

23 Reuben—Jacob's first-born. Said R. Simon: We see how difficult the Holy One finds it to disrupt genealogy. Reuben's status as first-born for inheritance purposes was taken from him, but when the genealogies are given he is still Jacob's first-born.

RASHBAM **20 It is the pillar at Rachel's grave to this day.** Samuel mentions "the tomb of Rachel" (1 Sam. 10:2) to Saul when Saul is about to leave him after Samuel anoints him as king.

21 Beyond Migdal-eder. This was somewhere near Bethlehem. Notice that Micah addresses it in Mic. 4:8 and turns next, in Mic. 5:1, to Bethlehem.

22 And Israel found out. We are only told about this incident to explain the context of 49:4. **Now the sons of Jacob were twelve in number.** Now that Benjamin had been born. But the text waits until now to say so in order not to interrupt the story of what followed after his birth.

IBN EZRA **20 Over her grave.** The less common Hebrew word for "grave" is used here, but there is no difference between this and the more common *kever*.

22 Reuben went. Our Sages of blessed memory have explained this quite well; **[I]** "a clever man conceals his humiliation" (Prov. 12:16). **Now the sons of Jacob were twelve in number.** Bilhah had been defiled, Rachel was dead, and he was disgusted with Leah and her maid because of what Reuben had done. So he was through with having children and devoted himself entirely to serving God.

[I] See Rashi's comment.

NAHMANIDES **22 And Israel found out.** The text shows us Jacob's humility. Having found out that his son had "brought disgrace" (49:4) by "mounting his couch," Jacob did not expel him from the family or disinherit him. **Now the sons of Jacob were twelve in number.** Even though this is the beginning of a new topic, the text combines two verses into one to demonstrate that Reuben did not lose his place. But in context it seems likely that Reuben moved Bilhah's bed because he was afraid she would have more children. As the first-born, entitled to two shares, he had twice as much to lose as his brothers. He was not worried about his mother having more sons (she was too old), and perhaps Zilpah had died, or he did not want to interfere with her, since she was his mother's servant. Anyway, his losing the birthright was a case of measure for measure. "The sons of Jacob were twelve" is a kind of summary statement; Jacob had no more sons after this.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **20 Over her grave Jacob set up a pillar.** He explains in 48:7 why he buried her there (Bekhor Shor). Because the grave was at a crossroads and he was afraid of grave robbers (Sforno).

21 Israel journeyed on, and pitched his tent beyond Migdal-eder. He did not want to enter the city because he was still afraid of the locals on account of the Shechem incident (Gersonides).

22 And Israel found out. This is one of just 25 times where there is a space in the middle of the verse (Masorah). He obviously never slept with Bilhah again, just as David, when he returned to power after Absalom had secluded himself with his concubines, "provided for them, but he did not cohabit with them" (2 Sam. 20:3). But Jacob lost nothing by it, having already fathered the 12 sons whom the verse goes on to count (Bekhor Shor). Apparently Bilhah and her sons told him. But since all 12 sons had already been born, there was no stain on the family (Abarbanel).

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NJPS Issachar, and Zebulun. [24]The sons of Rachel: Joseph and Benjamin. [25]The sons of Bilhah, Rachel's maid: Dan and Naphtali. [26]And the sons of Zilpah, Leah's maid: Gad and Asher. These are the sons of Jacob who were born to him in Paddan-aram.

[27]And Jacob came to his father Isaac at Mamre, at Kiriath-arba—now Hebron—where Abraham and Isaac had sojourned. [28]Isaac was a hundred and eighty years old [29]when he breathed his last and died. He was gathered to his kin in ripe old age; and he was buried by his sons Esau and Jacob.

36 This is the line of Esau—that is, Edom.

וְיִשָּׂשכָר וּזְבֻלוּן׃ 24 בְּנֵי רָחֵל יוֹסֵף וּבִנְיָמִן׃
25 וּבְנֵי בִלְהָה שִׁפְחַת רָחֵל דָּן וְנַפְתָּלִי׃
26 וּבְנֵי זִלְפָּה שִׁפְחַת לֵאָה גָּד וְאָשֵׁר אֵלֶּה
בְּנֵי יַעֲקֹב אֲשֶׁר יֻלַּד־לוֹ בְּפַדַּן אֲרָם׃
27 וַיָּבֹא יַעֲקֹב אֶל־יִצְחָק אָבִיו מַמְרֵא
קִרְיַת הָאַרְבַּע הִוא חֶבְרוֹן אֲשֶׁר־גָּר־שָׁם
אַבְרָהָם וְיִצְחָק׃ 28 וַיִּהְיוּ יְמֵי יִצְחָק מְאַת
שָׁנָה וּשְׁמֹנִים שָׁנָה׃ 29 וַיִּגְוַע יִצְחָק וַיָּמָת
וַיֵּאָסֶף אֶל־עַמָּיו זָקֵן וּשְׂבַע יָמִים וַיִּקְבְּרוּ
אֹתוֹ עֵשָׂו וְיַעֲקֹב בָּנָיו׃ פ

לו וְאֵלֶּה תֹּלְדוֹת עֵשָׂו הוּא אֱדוֹם׃

OJPS and Issachar, and Zebulun; [24]the sons of Rachel: Joseph and Benjamin; [25]and the sons of Bilhah, Rachel's handmaid: Dan and Naphtali; [26]and the sons of Zilpah, Leah's handmaid: Gad and Asher. These are the sons of Jacob, that were born to him in Paddan-aram.

[27]And Jacob came unto Isaac his father to Mamre, to Kiriath-arba—the same is Hebron—where Abraham and Isaac sojourned. [28]And the days of Isaac were a hundred and fourscore years. [29]And Isaac expired, and died, and was gathered unto his people, old and full of days; and Esau and Jacob his sons buried him.

36 Now these are the generations of Esau—the same is Edom.

RASHI they are listed. Joseph was not given the status of first-born except with regard to the tribes, where he did get the double share that belongs to the first-born.

27 At Mamre, at Kiriath-arba. Rather, "at the Mamre [the plateau] *of* Kiriath-arba." Mamre was the name of the plateau; Kiriath-arba was the name of the city. Notice that the definite article occurs in Hebrew on Arba, not on Kiriath; this is the standard way to do it for place names that have two parts. See the Hebrew of 1 Sam. 16:1, Judg. 6:24, and 1 Kings 16:34 for other examples.

29 [Isaac] breathed his last. (See OJPS.) The Torah is not always written in chronological order. The sale of Joseph occurred 12 years before the death of Isaac. Jacob was born when Isaac was 60: "Isaac was sixty years old when they were born" (25:26). Subtract 60 from "a hundred and eighty" (v. 28) and you get 120, so Isaac died when Jacob was 120. Now, Joseph was sold when he was 17 and Jacob was 108. Jacob got the blessing when he was 63 and hid out in the house of Eber for 14 years, until he was 77; **[O]** he worked for his wives for 14 years, at which point Joseph was born: "After Rachel had borne Joseph, Jacob said to Laban, 'Give me leave to go back to my own homeland'" (30:25). So at that point he was 91. Add the 17 years, at which point Joseph is sold, and you have 108, 12 years before Isaac died.

[O] See Rashi's comment to 28:9.

RASHBAM **29 He was buried by his sons Esau and Jacob.** Esau is mentioned first since he was after all the first-born; in this spot Jacob gave him that honor. But "Isaac and Ishmael" buried Abraham (25:9), because Ishmael was the son of the maidservant, not of the wife.

IBN EZRA **26 Who were born to him in Paddan-aram.** Eleven sons were born to him there, for Benjamin was born in Canaan; the text is speaking in general terms. I could show you many other examples of this kind.

29 He was gathered to his kin in ripe old age; and he was buried by his sons Esau and Jacob. When Isaac dies, "Esau and Jacob" bury him, being listed in birth order; but "Isaac and Ishmael" buried Abraham, because Ishmael was the son of the slave woman.

36:1 Esau—that is, Edom. Esau is the ancestor of Edom.

KIMHI **27 Kiriath-arba.** See my comment to "now Hebron" of 23:2. The Hebrew of our verse uses the definite article with this apparent proper noun ("the" Kiriath-arba) because even though Arba was the father's name, it is also a word meaning "four," relating to him and his three sons. **Where Abraham and Isaac had sojourned.** It is proper to dwell where one's ancestors dwelt, out of respect for the place they are buried: "If it please the king . . . send me to Judah, to the city of my ancestors' graves" (Neh. 2:5).

36:1 Esau—that is, Edom. See "which is why he was named Edom" (25:30).

NAHMANIDES **26 These are the sons of Jacob who were born to him in Paddan-aram.** See my comment at the end of 36:12.

28 Isaac was a hundred and eighty years old. See Rashi's comment. As I have explained in my comment to 11:32, the text normally tells us about a man's life, his children, and his death, and then goes back to tell us the story of the son. So the text might well have told us about Isaac's death before telling what happened to Jacob, just as it did with Abraham and all the rest. By leaving Isaac's death until now, the text meant to show us that Isaac was able to die contentedly once the son he had blessed, who would inherit his status, had returned to him.

29 He was buried by his sons Esau and Jacob. The greatest men living. Having told us that he was in Hebron, it went without saying that he was buried in the cave of Machpelah. Where would they bury him if not in the tomb where his own father was buried?

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **26 These are the sons of Jacob who were born to him in Paddan-aram.** Benjamin, of course, was not born in Paddan-aram. But he was born as a result of Rachel's prayer, "May the LORD add another son for me" (30:24), which she prayed in Paddan-aram (Hizkuni). They are listed here because this is the end of the story of Jacob (Gersonides).

29 He was gathered to his kin. As I explained in my comment to 25:8, he entered eternal life (Gersonides).

36:1 This is the line of Esau. Exactly the same Hebrew words are repeated to begin v. 9, since he had two different "lines," one with Adah and Basemath in Canaan and a second with Oholibamah in Seir. He split his time between the two families (Bekhor Shor). More precisely, "*And* this is the line of Esau." Having written about the sons of Jacob, the text now gives you some information about the sons of Esau (Hizkuni). The "generations" of Esau (see OJPS) is an idiom for what happened to him and his descendants, what he "gave birth" to, as in the expression from Prov. 27:1, "you do not know what the day will *bring*" (Sforno).

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NJPS [2]Esau took his wives from among the Canaanite women—Adah daughter of Elon the Hittite, and Oholibamah daughter of Anah daughter of Zibeon the Hivite—[3]and also Basemath daughter of Ishmael and sister of Nebaioth. [4]Adah bore to Esau Eliphaz; Basemath bore Reuel; [5]and Oholibamah bore Jeush, Jalam, and Korah. Those were the sons of Esau, who were born to him in the land of Canaan.

[6]Esau took his wives, his sons and daughters, and all the members of his household, his cattle and all his livestock, and all the property that he had acquired in

OJPS [2]Esau took his wives of the daughters of Canaan; Adah the daughter of Elon the Hittite, and Oholibamah the daughter of Anah, the daughter of Zibeon the Hivite, [3]and Basemath Ishmael's daughter, sister of Nebaioth. [4]And Adah bore to Esau Eliphaz; and Basemath bore Reuel; [5]and Oholibamah bore Jeush, and Jalam, and Korah. These are the sons of Esau, that were born unto him in the land of Canaan.

[6]And Esau took his wives, and his sons, and his daughters, and all the souls of his house, and his cattle, and all his beasts, and all his possessions, which he had gathered

[2] עֵשָׂו לָקַח אֶת־נָשָׁיו מִבְּנוֹת כְּנָעַן אֶת־
עָדָה בַּת־אֵילוֹן הַחִתִּי וְאֶת־אָהֳלִיבָמָה
בַּת־עֲנָה בַּת־צִבְעוֹן הַחִוִּי׃ [3] וְאֶת־בָּשְׂמַת
בַּת־יִשְׁמָעֵאל אֲחוֹת נְבָיוֹת׃ [4] וַתֵּלֶד עָדָה
לְעֵשָׂו אֶת־אֱלִיפָז וּבָשְׂמַת יָלְדָה אֶת־
רְעוּאֵל׃ [5] וְאָהֳלִיבָמָה יָלְדָה אֶת־יעיש
יְעוּשׁ וְאֶת־יַעְלָם וְאֶת־קֹרַח אֵלֶּה בְּנֵי עֵשָׂו
אֲשֶׁר יֻלַּד־לוֹ בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן׃
[6] וַיִּקַּח עֵשָׂו אֶת־נָשָׁיו וְאֶת־בָּנָיו וְאֶת־
בְּנֹתָיו וְאֶת־כָּל־נַפְשׁוֹת בֵּיתוֹ וְאֶת־מִקְנֵהוּ
וְאֶת־כָּל־בְּהֶמְתּוֹ וְאֵת כָּל־קִנְיָנוֹ אֲשֶׁר

RASHI **36:2 Adah daughter of Elon.** She is called "Basemath daughter of Elon" in 26:34 because she burned spices (*besamim*) as incense to idols. **Oholibamah.** Esau nicknamed her "Judith" (see again 26:34)—that is, "Judahite"—to mislead his father into thinking that she had forsaken idolatry. **Daughter of Anah daughter of Zibeon.** She could not be both daughter of Anah and daughter of Zibeon; her father, Anah, was the son of Zibeon (see v. 24). The verse is teaching us that Zibeon had sex with his son Anah's wife, Oholibamah being produced between the two of them. The text is informing you that all these people are of illegitimate birth.

3 Basemath daughter of Ishmael. In 28:9 she is called Mahalath. We find the following in the midrash on Samuel: Three kinds of people have their sins forgiven: a stranger who converts to Judaism, one who rises to a position of power, and one who marries a wife. The text derives the latter category from our case; Mahalath was so named because when she married Esau, her sins were erased (*nimḥalu*). **[P] And sister of Nebaioth.** Since Esau married her after Ishmael died, she is identified in this way as well.

5 Oholibamah bore Jeush, Jalam, and Korah. This Korah was illegitimate; he was the son of Eliphaz, who slept with his father Esau's wife. See v. 16.

6 And went to another land. To live however and wherever he could find a place.

[P] Some texts of Rashi take the midrash to say that Esau's sins were erased; the difference in Hebrew is one letter.

NAHMANIDES **36:2 Adah daughter of Elon.** See Rashi's comments to vv. 2–3, where (however) he does not explain why Oholibamah's father is called Anah here and Beeri in 26:34. And somehow he treats our Basemath, the daughter of Ishmael (v. 3), as just a name, while Basemath daughter of Elon (of 26:34) is named after *besamim* ("incense"). Genesis Rabbah explains both of Ishmael's daughters' names, Basemath and Mahalath ("forgiveness"), as nicknames indicating that Esau intended to convert to Judaism. So we do not know the real names of either of them. What Ibn Ezra says about Abijah and his mother is to be interpreted the same way—one of the names was just a name, but the other was descriptive and meaningful. **[S]** It could be that Esau's first wives, Judith and Basemath, both died without children, perhaps as punishment for being "a source of bitterness to Isaac and Rebekah" (26:35), and that he subsequently married another daughter of Elon, Ada, along with Oholibamah daughter of Anah.

3 Basemath daughter of Ishmael and sister of Nebaioth. Because Mahalath (as she is called in 28:9) sounds to the Hebrew ear like *maḥalah* ("disease")—an ugly name—he called her Basemath, the respectable name that his first wife had had. For he loved the fact that she was from his family and did not displease his father, Isaac.

6 Esau took his wives, his sons and daughters, and all the members of his household. This journey took place after his brother returned from Haran and took possession of the land of Canaan, just as the verse says: **Because of his brother Jacob.** It may also have been after the death of their father. But even while Jacob was still in Haran, Esau was already in Seir, as we see from 32:4; he had gone there when "the sons of Seir the Horite" were already "settled in the land" (v. 20) and become a lord with 400 men. But his children and the rest of his household were still in Canaan. He may have already had a landholding in Seir, though, in "the field" of Edom (as 32:4 says; see OJPS)—that is, the flatlands, not Mount Seir itself. But once Jacob returned, Esau (knowing that their father had given Canaan to him) cleared out, moving his entire household off to Mount Seir to settle down there. At that time, there was a fight between him and "the sons of Seir the Horite," who may have been afraid to let him into Mount Seir, where their fortifications were. They wanted him to stay in "the *field* of Edom," the lowlands, where he had originally been. But eventually the Holy One "wiped out the Horites before

[S] It is possible that Nahmanides understood Ibn Ezra to be talking not about Abijah but about *aviha* ("her father"), one of Esau's fathers-in-law.

RASHBAM **36:2 Esau took his wives from among the Canaanite women.** The careful reader will note that Esau's wives have previously been identified as "Judith daughter of Beeri the Hittite and Basemath daughter of Elon the Hittite" (26:34) as well as "Mahalath the daughter of Ishmael" (28:9). But in our chapter, neither Judith nor Beeri is mentioned at all. Elon and Ishmael are named, but the names of the wives themselves are switched, as we find in numerous other places. Basemath daughter of Elon is called Adah here and Mahalath the daughter of Ishmael is called Basemath. It would seem therefore that Judith died without leaving any children, but that Elon's and Ishmael's daughters had the children listed in our chapter. Esau must have married Oholibamah daughter of Anah daughter of Zibeon the Hivite after he went to live in Mount Seir; notice that she is listed among the Seirites in v. 25. Timna, the concubine of Eliphaz (v. 12), is also listed as a Seirite, in v. 22. Since Oholibamah was Esau's last wife, she and her children come last in every list.

6 Because of his brother Jacob. Because Jacob bought the birthright and with it the right to be the heir of Isaac. That permitted Jacob to stay and settle "in the land where his father had sojourned" (37:1).

IBN EZRA **2 Adah daughter of Elon.** No need for surprise that the same woman is called "Basemath daughter of Elon" in 26:34; look at Abijah's mother, who is called Maacah in 1 Kings 15:2 and Micaiah in 2 Chron. 13:2. In fact, even Abijah's grandfather's name is different in the two different places. For that matter, Abijah himself is called Abijam in Kings.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **2 Esau.** "Esau" occurs 97 times in the Bible—but this is the only time "Esau" is the first word in a verse (Masorah).

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The Commentators' Bible: Genesis : The Rubin JPS Miqra'ot Gedolot, edited by Michael Carasik, The Jewish Publication Society, 2018. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/dtl/detail.action?docID=5492895.
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NJPS the land of Canaan, and went to another land because of his brother Jacob. 7For their possessions were too many for them to dwell together, and the land where they sojourned could not support them because of their livestock. 8So Esau settled in the hill country of Seir—Esau being Edom.

9This, then, is the line of Esau, the ancestor of the Edomites, in the hill country of Seir.

10These are the names of Esau's sons: Eliphaz, the son of Esau's wife Adah; Reuel, the son of Esau's wife Basemath. 11The sons of Eliphaz were Teman, Omar, Zepho, Gatam, and Kenaz. 12Timna was a concubine of Esau's son Eliphaz; she bore Amalek to Eliphaz. Those were the

רָכֻשׁ בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן וַיֵּלֶךְ אֶל־אֶרֶץ מִפְּנֵי
יַעֲקֹב אָחִיו׃ 7 כִּי־הָיָה רְכוּשָׁם רָב מִשֶּׁבֶת
יַחְדָּו וְלֹא יָכְלָה אֶרֶץ מְגוּרֵיהֶם לָשֵׂאת
אוֹתָם מִפְּנֵי מִקְנֵיהֶם׃ 8 וַיֵּשֶׁב עֵשָׂו בְּהַר
שֵׂעִיר עֵשָׂו הוּא אֱדוֹם׃
9 וְאֵלֶּה תֹּלְדוֹת עֵשָׂו אֲבִי אֱדוֹם בְּהַר
שֵׂעִיר׃
10 אֵלֶּה שְׁמוֹת בְּנֵי־עֵשָׂו אֱלִיפַז בֶּן־עָדָה
אֵשֶׁת עֵשָׂו רְעוּאֵל בֶּן־בָּשְׂמַת אֵשֶׁת עֵשָׂו׃
11 וַיִּהְיוּ בְּנֵי אֱלִיפַז תֵּימָן אוֹמָר צְפוֹ
וְגַעְתָּם וּקְנַז׃ 12 וְתִמְנַע | הָיְתָה פִילֶגֶשׁ
לֶאֱלִיפַז בֶּן־עֵשָׂו וַתֵּלֶד לֶאֱלִיפַז אֶת־

OJPS in the land of Canaan; and went into a land away from his brother Jacob. 7For their substance was too great for them to dwell together; and the land of their sojournings could not bear them because of their cattle. 8And Esau dwelt in the mountain-land of Seir—Esau is Edom.

9And these are the generations of Esau the father of a the Edomites in the mountain-land of Seir.

10These are the names of Esau's sons: Eliphaz the son of Adah the wife of Esau, Reuel the son of Basemath the wife of Esau. 11And the sons of Eliphaz were Teman, Omar, Zepho, and Gatam, and Kenaz. 12And Timna was concubine to Eliphaz Esau's son; and she bore to Eliphaz

RASHI **7 The land where they sojourned could not support them because of their livestock.** There was not enough pastureland for all their animals. But a midrash explains: Esau left as a result of the obligation imposed on all Isaac's descendants: "your offspring shall be strangers" (15:13). Esau decided, "I'm leaving. I have no share in the gift of this land and therefore no share in the obligation to be a stranger in some other land." And of course he was also embarrassed at having sold the birthright.

9 This, then, is the line of Esau. The "generations" (OJPS) produced by his sons after he left for Seir.

12 Timna was a concubine. This makes known the greatness of Abraham. He was so great that everyone wanted to be attached to him one way or another. Timna was the daughter of chieftains (see v. 22); her brother Lotan was one of the leaders of all the

RASHBAM **9 This, then, is the line of Esau.** Literally, his "generations" (OJPS), the sons of his sons. See my comment to "this is the line of Noah" (6:9). **[C]**

12 Timna was a concubine of Esau's son Eliphaz. I have seen in Midrash Lekah Tov **[D]** that "and Timna" (see OJPS) might also fit at the end of the previous verse; compare "The sons of Eliphaz: Teman, Omar, Zephi, Gatam, Kenaz, Timna, and Amalek" (1 Chron. 1:36). A different Timna is listed in

[C] We no longer have this comment; see instead his comment to 37:2. **[D]** Our manuscript of Rashbam said Shoher Tov here, but that seems to be a mistake.

IBN EZRA **10 These are the names of Esau's sons.** A better translation would be "Esau's descendants."

NAHMANIDES them, so that they dispossessed them and settled in their place" (Deut. 2:22). As that passage says explicitly, "I have given the hill country of Seir as a possession to Esau" (Deut. 2:5). **And went to another land.** Literally, "and went to the land of . . ." The phrase "another land" comes from Onkelos (and see Rashi's comment). As far as I am concerned, the text is simply using a shorthand way of saying "the land [of Seir]," which was so obvious that it literally went without saying; see v. 8. The Hebrew syntax involved nothing more than dropping the definite article, which happens in many other places. See the Hebrew of 2 Sam. 18:21, 1 Kings 13:28, 16:18 and 22:49, and 2 Kings 23:15, to list just a few of the many places this occurs. So too here.

7 The land where they sojourned could not support them. Not the land, but the city, Hebron, where "they," Abraham and Isaac, "had sojourned" (35:27). The land, of course, could have supported them and a thousand more like them. But seeing that he could not remain in his city and his place Esau left the entire land to his brother and went off.

9 This, then, is the line of Esau, the ancestor of the Edomites, in the hill country of Seir. These "generations" (OJPS) in Seir are those of Esau's children; he himself did not father any more children once they moved to Seir. But the sons of Oholibamah are included here as well (see v. 18), to group them with their brothers from the beginning of the chapter, though there is no record of their line continuing "in the hill country of Seir." But they did become chiefs in Seir; all the chiefs are listed.

12 Timna was a concubine of Esau's son Eliphaz; she bore Amalek to Eliphaz. Since the text did not take the trouble to mention any of the other mothers, our Sages interpreted this special mention of Timna; see Rashi's comment. But it could be that Eliphaz knew the five sons whom his wives bore to him but not Amalek, whom Timna bore; the latter was nonetheless included here because he was a descendant of Esau. The text had to say that his mother So-and-So (who was known) had borne him to Eliphaz. This, however, did not make him one of Esau's offspring, nor did he live with them in Mount Seir. The sons of the wives would be considered his offspring, not the son of a concubine. The "son of a slave" (21:10) would not share in the inheritance. Now, we are commanded, "You shall not abhor an Edomite" (Deut. 23:8), nor are we to take any of their land, "they" being all of Esau's descendants who dwell in Seir and are called "Edom" after him. This son of a concubine, however, is not one of them and does not dwell in their land. With him, we are commanded the opposite: to abhor him and to blot out his name. I absolutely cannot accept what Rashi says about Timna being Lotan's sister from the same mother but not from the same father. Let 1 Chron. 1:36 call Timna his "daughter"! Why would it list a daughter among the sons? But perhaps the Chronicler assumed everyone knew this. We do find him listing the "sons" of Amram, "Aaron, Moses, and Miriam," next to "the sons of Aaron: Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar" (1 Chron. 5:29). In that case, we must consider this Timna to be a daughter of Eliphaz borne to him by the wife of Seir after the death of her husband, making her Lotan's maternal half-sister. She then married Eliphaz as a concubine, for among the idolaters a man is permitted to sleep with his daughter. Or else we must follow the rabbinic opinion that Timna of Chronicles is Timna the chief (v. 40), listed in Chronicles as a son of Eliphaz, just as Korah is listed as a son of Esau in 1 Chron. 1:35; note that he is a son of Oholibamah here in v. 5. Both of them were illegitimate, borne of one woman but listed as the son of another. It is simply implausible that a woman would be listed among men without our being told that she was female. The straightforward way to

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **8 Esau settled in the hill country of Seir.** The implication of 32:4 and 33:14 must be that previous to this Esau and his men went to Seir to entertain themselves by hunting, without the wives and children around (Abarbanel).

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NJPS descendants of Esau's wife Adah. 13And these were the sons of Reuel: Nahath, Zerah, Shammah, and Mizzah. Those were the descendants of Esau's wife Basemath. 14And these were the sons of Esau's wife Oholibamah, daughter of Anah daughter of Zibeon: she bore to Esau Jeush, Jalam, and Korah.

15These are the clans of the children of Esau. The descendants of Esau's first-born Eliphaz: the clans Teman, Omar, Zepho, Kenaz, 16Korah, Gatam, and Amalek; these are the clans of Eliphaz in the land of Edom. Those are the descendants of Adah. 17And these are the descendants of Esau's

עֲמָלֵק אֵלֶּה בְּנֵי עָדָה אֵשֶׁת עֵשָׂו׃ 13 וְאֵלֶּה
בְּנֵי רְעוּאֵל נַחַת וָזֶרַח שַׁמָּה וּמִזָּה אֵלֶּה
הָיוּ בְּנֵי בָשְׂמַת אֵשֶׁת עֵשָׂו׃ 14 וְאֵלֶּה הָיוּ
בְּנֵי אָהֳלִיבָמָה בַת־עֲנָה בַּת־צִבְעוֹן אֵשֶׁת
עֵשָׂו וַתֵּלֶד לְעֵשָׂו אֶת־יעיש יְעוּשׁ וְאֶת־
יַעְלָם וְאֶת־קֹרַח׃
15 אֵלֶּה אַלּוּפֵי בְנֵי־עֵשָׂו בְּנֵי אֱלִיפַז בְּכֹר
עֵשָׂו אַלּוּף תֵּימָן אַלּוּף אוֹמָר אַלּוּף צְפוֹ
אַלּוּף קְנַז׃ 16 אַלּוּף־קֹרַח אַלּוּף גַּעְתָּם
אַלּוּף עֲמָלֵק אֵלֶּה אַלּוּפֵי אֱלִיפַז בְּאֶרֶץ
אֱדוֹם אֵלֶּה בְּנֵי עָדָה׃ 17 וְאֵלֶּה בְּנֵי רְעוּאֵל
בֶּן־עֵשָׂו אַלּוּף נַחַת אַלּוּף זֶרַח אַלּוּף שַׁמָּה

OJPS Amalek. These are the sons of Adah Esau's wife. 13And these are the sons of Reuel: Nahath, and Zerah, Shammah, and Mizzah. These were the sons of Basemath Esau's wife. 14And these were the sons of Oholibamah the daughter of Anah, the daughter of Zibeon, Esau's wife; and she bore to Esau Jeush, and Jalam, and Korah.

15These are the chiefs of the sons of Esau: the sons of Eliphaz the first-born of Esau: the chief of Teman, the chief of Omar, the chief of Zepho, the chief of Kenaz, 16the chief of Korah, the chief of Gatam, the chief of Amalek. These are the chiefs that came of Eliphaz in the land of Edom. These are the sons of Adah. 17And these are the sons of Reuel Esau's son: the

RASHI inhabitants of Seir, one of the Horites who had originally lived there. Yet she still thought, "Even though I am not worthy of being married to you, at least let me be your concubine." 1 Chron. 1:36 identifies her as one of the children of Eliphaz, teaching us that Eliphaz slept with his father Seir's wife, Timna being produced between the two of them. When she grew up, she became his concubine, making her "Lotan's sister" (v. 22). But she is not listed among the children of Seir in vv. 20–21, because she was Lotan's sister from the same mother but not from the same father.

15 These are the clans of the children of Esau. Rather, "the chiefs" (OJPS), the heads of the clans.

NAHMANIDES explain our verse is that Timna the concubine, after giving birth to Amalek, died while giving birth to another son, naming him Timna as a memorial to herself; but his father, Eliphaz, called him Korah. The text does not connect this son with his birth mother, Timna, because the story would have gotten too complicated. In any case, the point was to list Amalek separately from the other sons of Eliphaz. Note that he is listed as the last of the seven in vv. 15–16, where the listing is in order of rank, not birth order. I am also willing to accept with this verse what we find written in the *Baraita of 32 Rules*: that many verses are written separately that can only be understood correctly if read together. If our vv. 11–12 fall into that category, then they should be read as follows: "The sons of Eliphaz were Teman, Omar, Zepho, Gatam, and Kenaz and Timna; there was a concubine of Esau's son Eliphaz who bore Amalek to Eliphaz." This concubine was another Timna, the Timna who is "Lotan's sister" in v. 22. That is the reason her name is not mentioned here. The text did not want to confuse things by having a male Timna and a female one in the same verse. You see, then, that vv. 11–12 list seven sons of Eliphaz just as vv. 15–16 do, except that Timna, the son of Amalek here in v. 12, ended up being called Korah, the name under which he is listed in v. 16, to keep people from mistakenly thinking that *he* was the son of Timna the concubine. (He was given the name Korah when he became a chief.) Ibn Ezra's explanation would demand that 1 Chron. 1:36 be understood as "The sons of Eliphaz: Teman, Omar, Zephi, Gatam, Kenaz, and, [by] Timna, Amalek"; there is such a case of an understood preposition ל in 2 Sam. 4:2. But what I have figured out is the correct explanation. **Those were the descendants of Esau's wife Adah**. Most of them were; Amalek, as we have seen, was not. "These are the sons of Jacob who were born to him in Paddan-aram" (36:26) is similarly imprecise, since the latter phrase does not apply to Benjamin.

RASHBAM that same section, along with the sons of Lotan: "Lotan's sister was Timna" (1 Chron. 1:39). (See further my comment to "sister of Nebaioth" in 28:9.) We might therefore understand our passage as follows: "The sons of Eliphaz were Teman, Omar, Zepho, Gatam, and Kenaz and Timna, and [a different] Timna [the female listed in v. 22] was a concubine of Esau's son Eliphaz." A similar case is found in Josh. 13:7, where "the half-tribe of Manasseh" would seem to demand to be repeated in the next verse (where of course it would have to refer to the *other* half of the tribe of Manasseh). I myself have discovered yet a third example of this syntax; compare 1 Chron. 8:35–36 with 1 Chron. 9:41–42.

15 These are the clans. All these "clans" are really "chiefs" (OJPS) of clans and of cities.

16 Korah. In my view, he is the same person as Timna in the equivalent list in 1 Chron. 1:36. The Korah of vv. 14 and 18, Oholibamah's son, is someone else.

IBN EZRA **14 Oholibamah, daughter of Anah daughter of Zibeon**. We find Anah as the brother of Zibeon in v. 20 and as the son of Zibeon in v. 24. Evidently the father and son, or the two brothers, both slept with the same woman, and no one had any idea who the children's fathers were. This Oholibamah could be the daughter of the Anah who was the son of Zibeon; the text could be trying in this way to distinguish the two Anahs. **She bore to Esau Jeush, Jalam, and Korah**. Some say that this Korah, descended from Oholibamah, is to be distinguished from the Korah of v. 16, who was descended from Adah/Basemath. But to me it seems more plausible that the Korah of v. 16 is the same as our Korah, mentioned among the chiefs of Eliphaz because he dwelt among them. Possibly, since he was the youngest of Oholibamah's sons, she died when he was still quite little and he was raised by Adah along with her own sons, as was the case with "the sons of Michal" in 2 Sam. 21:8, who had really been borne by her sister, Merab. **[J]** Similarly, Amalek, whose mother was "a concubine of Esau's son Eliphaz" (v. 12), is listed for that reason among "the descendants of Esau's wife Adah."

15 These are the clans of the children of Esau. Not the "clans" but the "chiefs" (OJPS). The similar-sounding word in Jer. 11:19 is unrelated.

[J] Since 2 Sam. 6:23 says that "Michal daughter of Saul had no children," 2 Sam. 21:8 poses a difficulty; NJPS replaces "Michal" in that verse with "Merab" (see their note).

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **14 Oholibamah, daughter of Anah daughter of Zibeon**. Ibn Ezra's comment is obviously wrong; it does not say "Oholibamah, daughter of Anah *son* of Zibeon" (Gersonides).

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NJPS son Reuel: the clans Nahath, Zerah, Shammah, and Mizzah; these are the clans of Reuel in the land of Edom. Those are the descendants of Esau's wife Basemath. 18And these are the descendants of Esau's wife Oholibamah: the clans Jeush, Jalam, and Korah; these are the clans of Esau's wife Oholibamah, the daughter of Anah. 19Those were the sons of Esau—that is, Edom—and those are their clans.

20These were the sons of Seir the Horite, who were settled in the land: Lotan, Shobal, Zibeon, Anah, 21Dishon, Ezer, and Dishan. Those are the clans of the Horites, the descendants of Seir, in the land of Edom.

22The sons of Lotan were Hori and Hemam; and Lotan's sister was Timna. 23The sons of Shobal were these: Alvan, Manahath, Ebal, Shepho, and Onam. 24The sons of Zibeon were these: Aiah and Anah—that was the Anah who discovered

OJPS chief of Nahath, the chief of Zerah, the chief of Shammah, the chief of Mizzah. These are the chiefs that came of Reuel in the land of Edom. These are the sons of Basemath Esau's wife. 18And these are the sons of Oholibamah Esau's wife: the chief of Jeush, the chief of Jalam, the chief of Korah. These are the chiefs that came of Oholibamah the daughter of Anah, Esau's wife. 19These are the sons of Esau, and these are their chiefs; the same is Edom.

20These are the sons of Seir the Horite, the inhabitants of the land: Lotan and Shobal and Zibeon and Anah, 21and Dishon and Ezer and Dishan. These are the chiefs that came of the Horites, the children of Seir in the land of Edom.

22And the children of Lotan were Hori and Hemam; and Lotan's sister was Timna. 23And these are the children of Shobal: Alvan and Manahath and Ebal, Shepho and Onam. 24And these are the children of Zibeon: Aiah and Anah—this is Anah who found the hot springs in the

אַלּוּף מִזָּה אֱלֹה אַלּוּפֵי רְעוּאֵל בְּאֶרֶץ
אֱדוֹם אֵלֶּה בְּנֵי בָשְׂמַת אֵשֶׁת עֵשָׂו׃
18 וְאֵלֶּה בְּנֵי אָהֳלִיבָמָה אֵשֶׁת עֵשָׂו אַלּוּף
יְעוּשׁ אַלּוּף יַעְלָם אַלּוּף קֹרַח אֵלֶּה
אַלּוּפֵי אָהֳלִיבָמָה בַּת־עֲנָה אֵשֶׁת עֵשָׂו׃
19 אֵלֶּה בְנֵי־עֵשָׂו וְאֵלֶּה אַלּוּפֵיהֶם הוּא
אֱדוֹם׃ ס שביעי
20 אֵלֶּה בְנֵי־שֵׂעִיר הַחֹרִי יֹשְׁבֵי הָאָרֶץ
לוֹטָן וְשׁוֹבָל וְצִבְעוֹן וַעֲנָה׃ 21 וְדִשׁוֹן וְאֵצֶר
וְדִישָׁן אֵלֶּה אַלּוּפֵי הַחֹרִי בְּנֵי שֵׂעִיר בְּאֶרֶץ
אֱדוֹם׃
22 וַיִּהְיוּ בְנֵי־לוֹטָן חֹרִי וְהֵימָם וַאֲחוֹת
לוֹטָן תִּמְנָע׃ 23 וְאֵלֶּה בְּנֵי שׁוֹבָל עַלְוָן
וּמָנַחַת וְעֵיבָל שְׁפוֹ וְאוֹנָם׃ 24 וְאֵלֶּה בְנֵי־
צִבְעוֹן וְאַיָּה וַעֲנָה הוּא עֲנָה אֲשֶׁר מָצָא

RASHI **20 Who were settled in the land.** That is, they were the inhabitants of that land before Esau came there. Our Sages explain that they were "settlers" *par excellence*—they could taste the soil and know exactly what to plant where: "Fill this plot with olive trees and that one with grapevines."

24 Aiah and Anah. The text literally says "and Aiah and Anah," but as the translations recognize, this ו is superfluous. There are many such cases; see (e.g.) "and horse and chariot" (Ps. 76:7). **That was the Anah.** The one mentioned in v. 20, where he is

KIMHI **19 Their clans.** Their "chiefs" (OJPS); as our Sages remind us, these "chiefs" are kings in all but the crown. Their genealogy is recorded here out of respect for Isaac, just as "the line of Ishmael" (25:12) is recorded out of respect for Abraham. And of course the warning to the Israelites "not to provoke them" (Deut. 2:5) meant that they had to know which clans these were.

20 These were the sons of Seir the Horite, who were settled in the land. This is recorded to teach us that "the earth is the LORD's and all that it holds" (Ps. 24:1). He can take it from this one and give it to that one.

24 Aiah and Anah. The extra ו at the beginning is simply the "and" that often begins a biblical passage, no different than *"and* Abraham lifted up his eyes." My father of

NAHMANIDES **20 These were the sons of Seir the Horite.** "The Horite" is correct; he was of an ancient nation descended from a man named Hor. The fact that this was a nation is clear from Deut. 2:22. This man was named Seir after the geographical location that carried that name, which it clearly got from Esau—"a hairy man" (*ish sa'ir*), as he is called in 27:11—from the moment he entered that land and ever after. The name "Edomite" derives from Esau as well, **[T]** though the text distinguishes between Seir the Horite and the later "men of Seir" (who are identified as Edomites in 2 Chronicles 25). I will discuss the Horites further, God willing, in my comment to Deut. 2:10. See also the comments of Ibn Ezra and Rashi.

22 Lotan's sister was Timna. As in "the sister of Tubal-cain was Naamah" (4:22), "and their sister Serah" (46:17), "their sisters were Zeruiah and Abigail" (1 Chron. 2:16), and "Tamar was their sister" (1 Chron. 3:9), the text here follows the custom of identifying her by naming her brother. She really belongs in vv. 21 and 30 with the other Horites, but she was the full sister only of Lotan, so she is listed here and not there. Or she may have been only his maternal half-sister, and not related to Seir at all.

24 The sons of Zibeon were these: Aiah and Anah. The ו before Aiah is definitely superfluous; see 1 Chron. 5:24 for another of the kind (and there are many more). This Zibeon is the third son of Seir (v. 20), and his son Anah is identified immediately to distinguish him from his uncle Anah, his father's brother. Zibeon's son is the Anah who was Esau's father-in-law (v. 2). **Who discovered the hot springs.** A few of the Sages understand this to mean that he discovered that it was possible to breed mules, which is not possible with

[T] See 25:25 and 25:30.

RASHBAM **20 Who were settled in the land.** Who had been settled in the land previously: "Seir was formerly inhabited by the Horites; but the descendants of Esau dispossessed them" (Deut. 2:12).

22 Lotan's sister was Timna. She is identified as Lotan's sister because he was the oldest brother. "Sister of Nebaioth" (v. 3) and "Aaron's sister" (Exod. 15:20) are to be explained the same way. See my comment to 28:9.

24 Aiah and Anah. Rather, "Ve'aiah and Anah" (see the Hebrew). It is a name that happens to begin with a ו, like Vashti in

IBN EZRA **20 Seir.** We do not know anything about his origins; he is listed here to distinguish his descendants from those of Esau, since the Israelites will be commanded "not to provoke" (Deut. 2:5) the descendants of Esau. **The Horite.** Rather, "the noble" (see Jer. 27:20). Isa. 19:9 suggests that the word may have a basic meaning of "white," the noblest of colors, resembling as it does pure light; contrast "He shall attend upon kings; He shall not attend upon obscure men" (Prov. 22:29), where the "obscure" men are literally "darkened" ones.

24 Aiah and Anah. The ו before Aiah is not "and" but is related to the Arabic

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **24 That was the Anah who discovered the hot springs.** Should you ask Rashi (who thinks he discovered how to breed mules) why his comment to 26:13 presumes that Isaac already had mules, the answer is simple: Anah was the first

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אֶת־הַיֵּמִם בַּמִּדְבָּר בִּרְעֹתָו אֶת־הַחֲמֹרִים
לְצִבְעֹון אָבִיו׃ 25 וְאֵלֶּה בְּנֵי־עֲנָה דִּישֹׁן
וְאָהֳלִיבָמָה בַּת־עֲנָה׃ 26 וְאֵלֶּה בְּנֵי דִישֹׁן
חֶמְדָּן וְאֶשְׁבָּן וְיִתְרָן וּכְרָן׃ 27 אֵלֶּה בְּנֵי־

NJPS the hot springs in the wilderness while pasturing the asses of his father Zibeon. 25The children of Anah were these: Dishon and Anah's daughter Oholibamah. 26The sons of Dishon were these: Hemdan, Eshban, Ithran, and Cheran. 27The sons of

OJPS wilderness, as he fed the asses of Zibeon his father. 25And these are the children of Anah: Dishon and Oholibamah the daughter of Anah. 26And these are the children of Dishon: Hemdan and Eshban and Ithran and Cheran. 27These are the

RASHI called the brother of Zibeon. Here he is Zibeon's son, teaching us that Zibeon slept with his mother to sire Anah. **The hot springs.** Rather, "the mules." He bred a male donkey with a female horse, and she gave birth to the first mule. Not only was he himself illegitimate, he brought illegitimate animals into the world. And why were they named *yemim*? Because they engendered *emah* ("fear") in people. Per R. Hanina on B. Hul. 7b, no one has ever recovered from the kick of a white-legged mule. In any case, this genealogy of the Horites is here only for the sake of Timna, making clear how greatly the offspring of Abraham were respected, as I explained in my comment to v. 12.

KIMHI blessed memory said that these were not superfluous but were an indication of some missing word or phrase, e.g., "[Abraham got up early] *and* Abraham lifted up his eyes." Here in our case, he understood the ו to be an indication that Zibeon had other sons before Aiah and Anah who are not mentioned in the text, perhaps because they had no descendants. (This is not the same Anah as in v. 20.)

NAHMANIDES other combinations of species. **In the wilderness while pasturing the asses of his father Zibeon.** Since he had so many asses there, he bred a few of them with mares, and they produced offspring. Apparently he was taken in his generation to be quite clever in realizing that these two species were so naturally close that it was possible to breed them. That made him famous, making it possible to identify him by mentioning it. Onkelos seems to think that these *yemim* were the Emim of Deut. 2:10, "a people great and numerous, and as tall as the Anakites," and that they wanted to steal his father Zibeon's asses from him. Being in the wilderness, he had no one who could come to his aid. He interprets *matza* not as "he found" but as the verb is used in "Your hand *is equal to* all Your enemies; [that is,] Your right hand overpowers Your foes" (Ps. 21:9). Or he may have meant that he "encountered" them and escaped, becoming known for this heroic encounter. That much is certainly correct.

25 The children of Anah were these: Dishon and Anah's daughter Oholibamah. This too is a typical way of mentioning a daughter: "Those were the sons . . . in addition to his daughter Dinah" (46:15). This Anah is the fourth son of Seir (v. 20); he too had a son, Dishon, named after his uncle, as well as a daughter, Oholibamah, also named after a relative. So the Oholibamah in v. 2 is the daughter of Anah in v. 24, not of the Anah in v. 20. But a few of the Sages think these two Anahs are the same man, the result of an incestuous relationship, listed first as a son of Seir (which people thought he was) and again as a son of Zibeon (which he really was). But this is a midrash of the Interpreters of Obscurities (see B. Pes. 54a)—it is not generally accepted. It is certainly not what the text is literally telling us here.

26 The sons of Dishon were these: Hemdan, Eshban, Ithran, and Cheran. This is Dishon of v. 21, the fifth son of Seir. He is called Dishan here (see the Hebrew), but it is the same name; the text does not bother to distinguish Dishon from Dishan unless they are both mentioned in the same verse (as in v. 21; see also Hirom and Hiram of 1 Kings 7:40). He is called Dishan here to distinguish him from the (different) Dishon who is a son of Anah in v. 25, whom a reader would most likely have thought was meant.

RASHBAM the book of Esther or Vophsi in Num. 13:14. True, 1 Chron. 1:40 calls them "Aiah and Anah," but names are sometimes recorded differently in different places; compare Hul, Gether, and Mash of 10:23 with Hul, Gether, and Meshech of 1 Chron. 1:17. Why would the text write a superfluous ו with this name in particular? In fact, the other examples of superfluous ו that have been offered are not superfluous at all. In "Tamar remained in her brother Absalom's house, and forlorn" (2 Sam. 13:20), "and" should not be omitted; the verse is really to be understood as "Tamar remained and [was] forlorn in her brother Absalom's house." She was alone *and* forlorn. See similarly 38:11, where Judah is telling Tamar not merely "to stay" in her father's house but "to stay a widow" there. As for "and horse and chariot" (Ps. 76:7), reading in the larger context is essential: "The stout-hearted were despoiled; they were in a stupor; the bravest of men could not lift a hand. At Your blast, O God of Jacob, horse and chariot lay stunned" (Ps. 76:6–7). That is, "The bravest of men could not lift a hand at Your blast . . . *and* horse and chariot lay stunned." See Exod. 15:2. **That was the Anah.** This phrase is written from the perspective of Moses, remembering Anah's famous discovery. **Who discovered the hot springs.** Rather, "who discovered the Yemim" (or perhaps this is name of some kind of wild animal). Obviously he was known for his victory over them. But we cannot really understand any more about this from the context.

IBN EZRA emphatic *fa* (it is missing in the matching "Aiah and Anah" of 1 Chron. 1:40). **The hot springs.** According to Onkelos, these *yemim* are "heroes," like "the *Emim*, a people great and numerous" (Deut. 2:10). It is not unusual to find א and י replacing each other in the same word; compare "vaunt themselves" (Ps. 94:4) with "revel" (Isa. 61:6). Saadia says it should not be "Anah who discovered the hot springs" but "Anah who bred the donkeys." For it could be that Anah was the one who first "discovered" the possibility of doing this (ordinarily animals of two different species that are interbred are not fertile). **While pasturing the asses of his father Zibeon.** This lends support to the breeding donkeys explanation. Others think the *yemim* are plants of some kind, but then what would be the point of mentioning the asses?

25 The children of Anah were these: Dishon and Anah's daughter Oholibamah. These are two different Anahs; what would be the point of mentioning the first one twice? Rather, the second Anah has already been mentioned in v. 24.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS to breed them, but sometimes the horses and donkeys mated without human intervention. And if you are wondering why such animals are infertile, the answer to that is simple too: not having been part of the original creation, they were not included in the command to "be fruitful and multiply" (8:17) when they came out of the ark (Hizkuni). Illegitimacy was so natural to them that they encouraged it even among their animals. Contrast Jacob's sons, who (in the words of Num. 16:3) were "holy, all of them, and the LORD is in their midst" (Abarbanel).

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NJPS Ezer were these: Bilhan, Zaavan, and Akan. [28]And the sons of Dishan were these: Uz and Aran.

[29]These are the clans of the Horites: the clans Lotan, Shobal, Zibeon, Anah, [30]Dishon, Ezer, and Dishan. Those are the clans of the Horites, clan by clan, in the land of Seir.

[31]These are the kings who reigned in the land of Edom before any king reigned over the Israelites. [32]Bela son of Beor reigned in Edom, and the name of his city was Dinhabah. [33]When Bela died, Jobab son of Zerah, from Bozrah, succeeded him

אֱצֶר בִּלְהָן וְזַעֲוָן וַעֲקָן׃ 28 אֵלֶּה בְנֵי־דִישָׁן
עוּץ וַאֲרָן׃
29 אֵלֶּה אַלּוּפֵי הַחֹרִי אַלּוּף לוֹטָן אַלּוּף
שׁוֹבָל אַלּוּף צִבְעוֹן אַלּוּף עֲנָה׃ 30 אַלּוּף
דִּשֹׁן אַלּוּף אֵצֶר אַלּוּף דִּישָׁן אֵלֶּה אַלּוּפֵי
הַחֹרִי לְאַלֻּפֵיהֶם בְּאֶרֶץ שֵׂעִיר׃ פ
31 וְאֵלֶּה הַמְּלָכִים אֲשֶׁר מָלְכוּ בְּאֶרֶץ
אֱדוֹם לִפְנֵי מְלָךְ־מֶלֶךְ לִבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל׃
32 וַיִּמְלֹךְ בֶּאֱדוֹם בֶּלַע בֶּן־בְּעוֹר וְשֵׁם עִירֹו
דִּנְהָבָה׃ 33 וַיָּמָת בֶּלַע וַיִּמְלֹךְ תַּחְתָּיו יוֹבָב

OJPS children of Ezer: Bilhan and Zaavan and Akan. [28]These are the children of Dishan: Uz and Aran.

[29]These are the chiefs that came of the Horites: the chief of Lotan, the chief of Shobal, the chief of Zibeon, the chief of Anah, [30]the chief of Dishon, the chief of Ezer, the chief of Dishan. These are the chiefs that came of the Horites, according to their chiefs in the land of Seir.

[31]And these are the kings that reigned in the land of Edom, before there reigned any king over the children of Israel. [32]And Bela the son of Beor reigned in Edom; and the name of his city was Dinhabah. [33]And Bela died, and Jobab the son of Zerah of Bozrah

RASHI **31 These are the kings who reigned in the land of Edom before any king reigned over the Israelites.** There were eight kings of Edom, and Jacob produced eight corresponding kings who canceled them out: Saul, Ish-bosheth, David, Solomon, Rehoboam, Abijah, Asa, and Jehoshaphat. Finally, in the days of Jehoshaphat's son Joram, we read, "During his reign, the Edomites rebelled against Judah's rule and set up a king of their own" (2 Kings 8:20). "There was no king in Edom; a viceroy acted as king" (1 Kings 22:48) had actually applied since the time of Saul.

33 Jobab son of Zerah, from Bozrah. Bozrah was one of the cities of Moab: "upon Kerioth and Bozrah—upon all the towns of the land of Moab" (Jer. 48:24). Since they provided a king for Edom, they ended up being punished along with them: "For the LORD holds a sacrifice in Bozrah, a great slaughter in the land of Edom" (Isa. 34:6).

KIMHI **31 These are the kings who reigned in the land of Edom before any king reigned over the Israelites.** None of these eight kings inherited the kingship from his father as did the kings of David's line. Moreover, for all that they established a monarchy before the Israelites, King Saul, the very first Israelite king, fought them and they could not prevail over him. David too humbled them and subordinated them to himself and to all the subsequent kings up to Jehoshaphat—not coincidentally, also the eighth king (counting Saul's son Ish-bosheth). It was in the days of Jehoram, Jehoshaphat's son, that Edom finally rebelled against Israel.

NAHMANIDES **31 These are the kings who reigned in the land of Edom.** This is written to tell us that Isaac's blessing of him was indeed fulfilled: "by your sword you shall live" (27:40). For they overcame the sons of Seir the Horite and reigned over them in their own country. The cities mentioned here are all jurisdictions in Edom. About Bozrah (v. 33), see "the LORD holds a sacrifice in Bozrah, a great slaughter in the land of Edom" (Isa. 34:6). The "land of the Temanites" (v. 34) was Edomite as well: "Your warriors shall lose heart, O Teman, and not a man on Esau's mount shall survive the slaughter" (Obad. 1:9). And the same goes for all the rest. This roster demonstrates that not one of them inherited the throne from his father as Jewish kings do. **Before any king reigned over the Israelites.** Not just "before," but long before. The point is most definitely not that these kings reigned up until the time when kings began to reign over Israel, but that once there were kings in Israel there would no longer be kings in Edom—to fulfill "you shall serve your brother" (27:40). It could well be that all eight of the kings listed here were gone by the time of Moses. Any or all of them might have become king at an advanced age and not ruled for particularly long.

RASHBAM **31 Before any king reigned over the Israelites.** That is, before Moses, who delivered Israel from its enemies. The great leaders of every nation are called "kings." I found in *Josippon* a list of some 40 more such kings between Moses' time and David's.

IBN EZRA **31 These are the kings who reigned in the land of Edom before any king reigned over the Israelites.** Some say this section was written through prophecy. Yitzhaki, **[K]** manipulating the generations however he wanted, said in his book that this section was written during the era of Jehoshaphat. But this explanation is as laughable as his name; everyone who hears it will laugh" (*yitzhak*). He thinks that Hadar (v. 39) is "the Edomite Hadad" (1 Kings 11:14), who fought Solomon, and that Mehetabel must be "the sister of Queen Tahpenes" (1 Kings 11:19), whom Pharaoh gave to that Hadad as wife. God forbid that what he said about this being written in Jehoshaphat's time be true! His book ought to be burnt. Are eight kings so many that Edom could not have had them between now and the time of Moses? The northern kingdom of Israel had twice as many kings in very little more time than this, and the kingdom of Judah had more kings than Edom did in the same amount of time. Anyway, the truth is that "before any king reigned over the Israelites" refers to the rule of Moses, who "became King in Jeshurun" (Deut. 33:5).

32 Bela son of Beor. This is not the same person as "Balaam son of Beor" (Num. 22:5). Nor was Balaam the son of Laban, as B. Sanh. 105a implies; perhaps the midrash is pointing out that they both were diviners, **[L]** for not a word of our Sages (of blessed memory) can fall to the ground. And of course Balaam, like Laban, was an Aramean. But this Bela is an Edomite.

33 Jobab. This is not Job of the book of Job, as that loudmouth Yitzhaki thinks.

[K] Known to us only from Ibn Ezra's caustic comments about him. **[L]** See 30:27 and Num. 23:23.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **31 These are the kings.** We learn that they were sometimes forced to crown foreign rulers over themselves for lack of anyone among them who was suitable to rule (Sforno).

33 Jobab son of Zerah, from Bozrah. Nahmanides thinks Bozrah was in Edom, but Rashi disagrees; he says it was one of the cities of Moab. What I think is that they crowned whomever they thought best, whether he was an Edomite or not. But the kings whose verses say "the name of his city" were Edomites. The others were foreigners (Abarbanel).

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בֶּן־זֶ֖רַח מִבָּצְרָֽה׃ 34 וַיָּ֥מָת יוֹבָ֖ב וַיִּמְלֹ֣ךְ
תַּחְתָּ֑יו חֻשָׁ֖ם מֵאֶ֥רֶץ הַתֵּימָנִֽי׃ 35 וַיָּ֥מָת
חֻשָׁ֖ם וַיִּמְלֹ֣ךְ תַּחְתָּ֑יו הֲדַ֞ד בֶּן־בְּדַ֗ד הַמַּכֶּ֤ה
אֶת־מִדְיָן֙ בִּשְׂדֵ֣ה מוֹאָ֔ב וְשֵׁ֥ם עִירֹ֖ו עֲוִֽית׃
36 וַיָּ֥מָת הֲדַ֖ד וַיִּמְלֹ֣ךְ תַּחְתָּ֑יו שַׂמְלָ֖ה
מִמַּשְׂרֵקָֽה׃ 37 וַיָּ֥מָת שַׂמְלָ֖ה וַיִּמְלֹ֣ךְ תַּחְתָּ֑יו
שָׁא֖וּל מֵרְחֹבֹ֥ות הַנָּהָֽר׃ 38 וַיָּ֥מָת שָׁא֖וּל
וַיִּמְלֹ֣ךְ תַּחְתָּ֑יו בַּ֥עַל חָנָ֖ן בֶּן־עַכְבֹּֽור׃
39 וַיָּ֥מָת בַּ֖עַל חָנָ֣ן בֶּן־עַכְבֹּ֑ור וַיִּמְלֹ֣ךְ
תַּחְתָּ֗יו הֲדַ֤ר וְשֵׁם־עִירֹו֙ פָּ֣עוּ וְשֵׁ֥ם אִשְׁתֹּ֖ו
מְהֵיטַבְאֵ֛ל בַּת־מַטְרֵ֥ד בַּת־מֵֽי זָהָֽב׃
40 וְאֵ֚לֶּה שְׁמֹ֣ות אַלּוּפֵ֣י עֵשָׂ֔ו לְמִשְׁפְּחֹתָ֖ם
לִמְקֹמֹתָ֑ם בִּשְׁמֹתָ֗ם אַלּ֤וף תִּמְנָע֙ אַלּ֣וף

NJPS as king. 34When Jobab died, Husham of the land of the Temanites succeeded him as king. 35When Husham died, Hadad son of Bedad, who defeated the Midianites in the country of Moab, succeeded him as king; the name of his city was Avith. 36When Hadad died, Samlah of Masrekah succeeded him as king. 37When Samlah died, Saul of Rehoboth-on-the-river succeeded him as king. 38When Saul died, Baal-hanan son of Achbor succeeded him as king. 39And when Baal-hanan son of Achbor died, Hadar succeeded him as king; the name of his city was Pau, and his wife's name was Mehetabel daughter of Matred daughter of Me-zahab.

40These are the names of the clans of Esau, each with its families and locality, name by name: the clans Timna, Alvah,

OJPS reigned in his stead. 34And Jobab died, and Husham of the land of the Temanites reigned in his stead. 35And Husham died, and Hadad the son of Bedad, who smote Midian in the field of Moab, reigned in his stead; and the name of his city was Avith. 36And Hadad died, and Samlah of Masrekah reigned in his stead. 37And Samlah died, and Shaul of Rehoboth by the River reigned in his stead. 38And Shaul died, and Baal-hanan the son of Achbor reigned in his stead. 39And Baal-hanan the son of Achbor died, and Hadar reigned in his stead; and the name of the city was Pau; and his wife's name was Mehetabel, the daughter of Matred, the daughter of Me-zahab.

40And these are the names of the chiefs that came of Esau, according to their families, after their places, by their names: the chief of Timna, the chief of Alvah, the

RASHI **35 Who defeated the Midianites in the country of Moab.** For Midian came to wage war on Moab, and the king of Edom went to assist the Moabites. We learn from here that although Moab and Midian were enemies they made peace in Balaam's time to conspire against Israel. **[Q.]**

39 Daughter of Me-zahab. Whose name means "what is the point of gold?" He was so rich that gold itself meant nothing to him.

40 These are the names of the clans of Esau. Rather, "the chiefs" of the clans (see OJPS). They were named after their cities once Hadar died and the monarchy ceased. The original clans are listed in vv. 15–18 by their ancestral names. As 1 Chronicles explains,

[Q.] See Numbers 22.

KIMHI **39 His wife's name was Mehetabel daughter of Matred.** We do not know why her name and her father's name are mentioned.

40 These are the names of the clans of Esau. These are the 11 chieftains who ruled after the eight kings.

NAHMANIDES **35 Who defeated the Midianites in the country of Moab.** This tells us how valorous he was. The Midianites came to Moab in order to build up their strength, and he defeated all of them.

38 Baal-hanan son of Achbor. Like his predecessor, Saul, he was from Rehoboth-on-the-river; this would explain why no town is listed for him. Alternatively, perhaps Hanan was the name of his town, and he was first "lord" (*baal*) of it and only afterward became king.

40 These are the names of the clans of Esau. The chiefs (see OJPS; not "clans") who are listed in vv. 15–19 were those who were chiefs in the generation of Esau's grandsons. Afterward, some of his descendants achieved the royal dignity; once that ceased, they went back to the older system and installed those listed here in vv. 40–43 as their chiefs. As Chronicles says, "And Hadad died. The clans of Edom were the clans of Timna, Alvah, Jetheth [and so forth]" (1 Chron. 1:51). That, at any rate, is how Rashi explains it. **Each with its families and locality, name by name.** The chiefs of vv. 15–19 were all brothers and all lived in the same city, ruling the people together as one, or perhaps as chieftains of tribes and heads of paternal houses. But each of the chiefs in our paragraph individually ruled all the families descended from Esau and all the localities where they lived. Each of them was the only one in his generation to bear the title "chief"; no one else in that territory was called by that title. They were the equivalents of kings except that they did not sit on the throne, nor were they given the royal dignity. Many people think this paragraph was written prophetically, but that is not correct. Why would prophecy even mention them? And if this was the kind of thing prophecy was concerned with, why

RASHBAM **39 Daughter of Me-zahab.** In commenting on the straightforward sense of the text, I do not need to spend much time explaining the meaning of the various names.

40 These are the names of the clans of Esau, each with its families and locality. Some of these "chiefs" (OJPS) are those listed among the descendants of Esau earlier in the chapter. But apparently those listed here eventually ended up being the most important, not merely chiefs of clans but rulers of various localities and settlements (see v. 43). Further evidence for this

IBN EZRA **39 Mehetabel daughter of Matred daughter of Me-zahab.** See my comment to "Oholibamah, daughter of Anah daughter of Zibeon" (v. 14). Or perhaps in this case the text is giving us the names of her father and her mother. As for Me-zahab—"Goldwater"—that just happened to be his name. Saadia thinks he was a goldsmith. Some people even think it means he knew how to turn copper into gold, but that is nonsense.

40 These are the names of the clans of Esau, each with its families and locality. Make that "the chiefs" of Esau. The point is that each of these had a locality that was known in the time of Moses. All these are the descendants of the chiefs listed in vv. 15–19, but only those with a known locality are listed. **Timna.** This Timna, unlike Timna of vv. 12 and 22, is a male. Many biblical names seem to have been used interchangeably for male and female, Oholibamah for one. Or perhaps this is an additional line of chiefs, descended from Timna

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **39 His wife's name was Mehetabel daughter of Matred daughter of Me-zahab.** She may have been given this genealogy because Hadar got the kingdom through her (Bekhor Shor).

40 These are the names of the clans of Esau. All these are the names of cities; but sometimes the man's name and the city's are the same (Bekhor Shor). This whole chapter demonstrates the fulfillment of the promise made to him in 27:40 that "by your sword you shall live" (Abarbanel).

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NJPS Jetheth, [41]Oholibamah, Elah, Pinon, [42]Kenaz, Teman, Mibzar, [43]Magdiel, and Iram. Those are the clans of Edom—that is, of Esau, father of the Edomites—by their settlements in the land which they hold.

OJPS chief of Jetheth; [41]the chief of Oholibamah, the chief of Elah, the chief of Pinon; [42]the chief of Kenaz, the chief of Teman, the chief of Mibzar; [43]the chief of Magdiel, the chief of Iram. These are the chiefs of Edom, according to their habitations in the land of their possession. This is Esau the father of the Edomites.

עֲלָוָה אַלּוּף יְתֵת׃ 41 אַלּוּף אָהֳלִיבָמָה
אַלּוּף אֵלָה אַלּוּף פִּינֹן׃ 42 אַלּוּף קְנַז
אַלּוּף תֵּימָן אַלּוּף מִבְצָר׃ 43 אַלּוּף מַגְדִּיאֵל
אַלּוּף עִירָם אֵלֶּה | אַלּוּפֵי אֱדוֹם
לְמוֹשְׁבֹתָם בְּאֶרֶץ אֲחֻזָּתָם הִוא עֵשָׂו אֲבִי
אֱדוֹם׃ פ

RASHI "And Hadad died. The chiefs of Edom were the chiefs of Timna, Alvah, Jetheth" and so forth (1 Chron. 1:51). **[R]**

43 Magdiel. This is Rome.

[R] Hadar of our chapter is a second Hadad in 1 Chronicles.

NAHMANIDES stop at this moment in time rather than at some other? In fact, all these men ruled before the giving of the Torah. If necessary, we could say that they too all ruled jointly, but each one in his own locality, or else that they too each ruled for just a short amount of time. "The fear of the LORD prolongs life, while the years of the wicked will be shortened" (Prov. 10:27).

43 Magdiel. According to Rashi, this is Rome. But I do not understand. Even if we agree for the sake of argument that this prophecy is "far ahead, and . . . for the distant future" (Ezek. 12:27), many kings ruled over Rome, but there was never a chief called "Rome." It was a vast empire, "fearsome, dreadful, and very powerful" (Dan. 7:7), unique on earth. What was meant in Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer (the source that identifies Magdiel as Rome) was just what I have already explained several times: that everything that happened to our ancestors symbolizes something that would happen to their offspring as well. These last chiefs—10 up to Magdiel—allude to the 10 who would reign over Edom as kings of the fourth kingdom described in Daniel: "from that kingdom, ten kings will arise, and after them another will arise. He will be different from the former ones" (Dan. 7:24). This 10th king would rule over Rome, after which their rule would spread over the entire world. That is what the name Magdiel alludes to, that he would "magnify himself [*yitgadel*] above every god [*el*]" (Dan. 11:36). Genesis Rabbah says that the 10 kings in Daniel would all descend from Esau. **Iram.** The last of them, so named because he will eventually pile up (*la'arom*) great treasuries of wealth for the King Messiah—may he speedily be revealed.

RASHBAM suggestion is found in the fact that vv. 40–43 are repeated in Chronicles but vv. 15–19 are not.

IBN EZRA the concubine of v. 12: Alvah and Jetheth. (This would make them chiefs of Amalek.)

41 Oholibamah. Following the second explanation of the previous comment, the text would now be listing the seven chiefs descended from Oholibamah whose localities were known in the time of Moses.

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VA-YESHEV

וישב

NJPS 37 Now Jacob was settled in the land where his father had sojourned, the land of Canaan. 2This, then, is the line of Jacob:

OJPS 37 And Jacob dwelt in the land of his father's sojournings, in the land of Canaan. 2These are the generations of Jacob.

לז וַיֵּשֶׁב יַעֲקֹב בְּאֶרֶץ מְגוּרֵי אָבִיו
בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן׃ 2 אֵלֶּה | תּוֹלְדוֹת יַעֲקֹב

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why tell us that Jacob "settled" (v. 1)—which is what the Hebrew says, not that he "was settled"—when 35:27 has already told us that "Jacob came to his father Isaac at Mamre, at Kiriath-arba—now Hebron" and he has not moved since we last heard of him? ✦ Why must "the land where his father had sojourned" be redefined as "the land of Canaan"? Isaac never left the land of Canaan in his entire life. ✦ Is this about "the line of Jacob" (v. 2), "the generations of Jacob" (OJPS), or "the story of Jacob" (as the same word is translated in 2:4)? It is certainly the story of Jacob's sons, not of Jacob himself; but Jacob's line, like his story, has already been given earlier and will be repeated elsewhere later. ✦ If it is really Jacob's "line," why does it begin with Joseph and not with Reuben? ✦ Why is that phrase necessary at all? Why not simply tell us that Jacob settled in the land and go on with the story of what happened when Joseph was 17?

RASHI **37:1 Now Jacob was settled in the land where his father had sojourned, the land of Canaan.** The previous chapter gives just a cursory discussion (due to their lack of importance) of Esau's "line" (36:9) after saying that he "settled in the hill country of Seir" (36:8). For example, we are told nothing of the wars they must have fought to dispossess the Horites. But now the line and the settlements of Jacob are given a long narrative, with all their twists and turns. The Holy One considered these important enough to give them a full airing. You find the same in the genealogy from Adam to Noah. "So-and-So begat So-and-So" over and over again until you reach Noah, at which point a long narrative begins. Again, from Noah to Abraham takes 10 brief generations, but once you reach Abraham the narrative returns. **[A]** It is like a man who drops a pearl in the sand. He keeps sifting until he finds it; once he finds it, he tosses away the pebbles he has accumulated and keeps the pearl. Another reading: The flax dealer brings in camels laden with flax. A charcoal burner asks in amazement, "Where is he going to keep all that flax?" A clever bystander says, "One spark from your fire and all his flax goes up in smoke." So too Jacob, when he saw all the chiefs of Esau listed in ch. 36, wondered, "Who could possibly conquer them all?" But what is written here? "Jacob. Joseph" (see OJPS to v. 2). For "the House of Jacob shall be fire, and the House of Joseph flame, and the House of Esau shall be straw" (Obad. 1:18). One spark from Joseph and they will all go up in smoke.

2 This, then, is the line of Jacob. That was the line of Esau, and "this is the line of Jacob." Here are *their* settlements, *their* twists and turns, until they finally manage to settle

[A] See ch. 5 and ch. 11 for these two genealogies.

RASHBAM **37:1 Now Jacob was settled in the land where his father had sojourned.** Esau "went to another land because of his brother Jacob" (36:6), but Jacob settled near his father in the land where he had sojourned, for the right of the first-born was his.

2 This, then, is the line of Jacob. Lovers of learning would do well to consider what our Sages have taught us: Even if the Torah's essential purpose is to use the text to tell us the various midrashim and *halakhot* by way of allusion—through extraneous language and the use of the 32 interpretive rules of R. Eliezer b. R. Yose the Galilean and the 13 rules of R. Ishmael—still, no verse ever loses its straightforward sense. The first interpreters, out of piety, were so preoccupied with this more essential kind of interpretation, which as I said is the point of the Torah, that they were quite unfamiliar with serious interpretation of the straightforward text. Now the Sages declared, "Do not let your children study Bible too much." **[A]** Moreover, the Sages declared that study of the Bible was only more

[A] "Bible" is Rashi's first interpretation of the difficult word used in this statement on B. Ber. 28b.

IBN EZRA 37:1 **Now Jacob was settled in the land.** Having noted that the chiefs of Esau "settled in the land" of Seir (36:8), the text correspondingly notes that Jacob settled in the chosen land.

2 This, then, is the line of Jacob. Rather, "these are the happenings of Jacob," the events that happened to come upon him; compare "you do not know what the

KIMHI **37:1 Now Jacob was settled in the land where his father had sojourned.** See my comment to 35:27.

2 Joseph tended the flocks. Rather, he tended "at" the flock. He was not yet old enough to tend the flocks, but went with his brothers when they tended the flocks so he

NAHMANIDES **37:1 Now Jacob was settled in the land where his father had sojourned, the land of Canaan.** We have just been told that the chiefs of Esau settled "in the land which they hold" (36:43)—that is, the land that they took as their eternal possession. By contrast, Jacob is settled as a sojourner, like his father, in a land that belongs not to him but to Canaan. The point is that they are nonetheless choosing to live in the chosen land. "Your offspring shall be strangers in a land not theirs" (15:13) was therefore not fulfilled by Esau but by Jacob, for it was through Jacob that offspring was to be continued for them.

2 This, then, is the line of Jacob. Despite what Rashi says, this phrase cannot really have anything to do with settlement. As for Ibn Ezra's suggestion, a day may "bring" various events to pass, but that does not mean that Jacob or any other human being can do so. (Perhaps he would say our text is to be understood as "these are the happenings [of the days] of Jacob.") Really the "generations" (OJPS) of Jacob are Joseph and his brothers. The brothers have all been named previously, so the text does not list them all again here, but merely says: "These are the generations of Jacob: Joseph and his brothers. And here is what happened to them." For that matter, "these" may

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **37:1 Now Jacob was settled in the land where his father had sojourned.** According to 35:27, in Hebron (Gersonides). But the phrase can also be understood as "in the land of his father's fright." There are many parallels between the two stories: Isaac had lost him for 22 years just as he would lose Joseph; he left with nothing and ended up a rich man, just as Joseph would do; he and Esau reconciled, just as Joseph and his brothers would do. But the Sages consider these as parallels between Jacob and Joseph; my point is that the verse tells us the parallel is between Isaac and Jacob. There is a second aspect to this verse, however. As long as he was in exile, Jacob did his best to attain wealth and the good things of life. But once he returned to the holy land, he left that to his sons and turned to meditation and wisdom as his father had. Hebron was suited for that, but you will note that it was completely unsuitable for raising sheep (Abarbanel).

2 This, then, is the line of Jacob. In Hebrew, as OJPS demonstrates, "the line of Jacob" is Joseph, "the line of Jacob" being his growth in learning and wisdom, in which only Joseph was a suitable successor (Abarbanel). Up to this point, his experiences had reflected

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NJPS At seventeen years of age, Joseph tended the flocks with his brothers, as a helper to the sons of his father's wives Bilhah and Zilpah. And

יוֹסֵף בֶּן־שְׁבַע־עֶשְׂרֵה שָׁנָה הָיָה רֹעֶה
אֶת־אֶחָיו בַּצֹּאן וְהוּא נַעַר אֶת־בְּנֵי בִלְהָה

OJPS Joseph, being seventeen years old, was feeding the flock with his brethren, being still a lad even with the sons of Bilhah, and with the sons

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why do we care that Joseph was "seventeen years of age" when he "tended the flocks"? Issachar and Zebulun were doing the same thing, and they were about the same age as he. ✦ How can the text say he was tending the flocks "with his brothers" when we see from vv. 12–14 that his brothers and the flocks were elsewhere? He had obviously never been there with them, because he gets lost trying to find them. ✦ Since we know he is 17, why must we be told that he was "still a lad" (see OJPS)?

RASHI down in the land for good. The first cause of all that would happen is as follows. **At seventeen years of age, Joseph tended the flocks.** This was the beginning of how they ended up rolling down to Egypt. That is what the text is about when you understand how all the parts fit together. **[B]** The midrash explains: The text begins "the line of Jacob" with Joseph for several reasons. First, all of Jacob's work for Laban had no other purpose than to get Rachel for himself. Next, Joseph was the spit and image of Jacob. Then, too, everything that happened to Jacob happened to Joseph as well: Jacob was mistreated and so was Joseph. Jacob's brother tried to kill him, and Joseph's brothers tried to kill him. Genesis Rabbah gives many more examples. We may add: Just when Jacob wished to settle down in peace and tranquility, this trouble with Joseph sprang up on him. The righteous wish to live tranquil lives. Says the Holy One: "The tranquility of the World to Come is not enough for them? They want to have tranquility in this world too?!" **As a helper.** Rather, he was "still a lad" (OJPS) and acting childishly. He was constantly fixing his hair and primping his eyes to make himself look nice. **To the sons of his father's wives Bilhah and Zilpah.** Rather, he was a lad "with" them (OJPS). Leah's sons would make fun of them, but he

[B] As in Rashi's comment to 3:8, his Hebrew alludes to the words "a phrase well turned" of Prov. 25:11.

KIMHI could learn how. **As a helper.** Rather, as "a lad" (OJPS); he was growing up with them while they were tending the flocks. **The sons of his father's wives.** There was therefore no shame in his doing this. As for Bilhah and Zilpah, despite NJPS, both 30:4

NAHMANIDES refer not merely to the 12 brothers but to everyone mentioned in the rest of the story, those who "went down to Egypt, seventy persons in all" (Deut. 10:22). The "generations of Esau" certainly discuss his descendants all the way down to the time of the Torah; so too for Jacob, albeit with much more detail. **As a helper to the sons of his father's wives Bilhah and Zilpah.** If Rashi is correct, why did the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah not save Joseph from the sons of Leah? They cannot have been afraid of them; they were four, plus Reuben was on their side, and of course Joseph himself was too. So they would have outnumbered the others (not that it would have come to outright war). The text seems to indicate that all the brothers acquiesced in the sale of Joseph. In fact, Genesis Rabbah says Joseph brought bad reports of all the brothers, not just Leah's sons. It seems to me that our text is to be understood as follows: Joseph, "a lad" (OJPS) of 17 years old, was with his brothers, that is, the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah. Our phrase is explaining the phrase that precedes it. You will find the same kind of explanatory phrasing in 40:5, with the cupbearer and the baker and their dreams, and in many other places. Alternatively, our phrase may be pointing out that Joseph, due to his youth, was constantly with the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah. Jacob put them, rather than the sons of Leah, in charge of

IBN EZRA day will *bring*" (Prov. 27:1). **As a helper to the sons of his father's wives Bilhah and Zilpah.** Since he was just "a lad" (OJPS), the sons of the maidservants made him serve them. **And Joseph brought bad reports of them to their father.** That they were

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS what happened to us in the first exile; from now on, they would reflect our second exile up through the eventual redemption at the End of Days (Sforno). **Joseph tended the flocks with his brothers.** Rather, "Joseph tended his brothers with the flocks." Even at age 17, he was so skillful and mature that he was guiding his brothers and teaching them how to care for the flocks. See how this Hebrew verb is used in Ezek. 34:15 and Ps. 80:2 (Abarbanel). **As a helper.** Either "as a helper" or as "a lad" (OJPS), this

RASHBAM or less worthwhile; study of the Talmud was far more worthwhile. So they were simply not very familiar with the straightforward sense of the biblical text. You can therefore find someone like R. Kahana on B. Shab. 63a saying, "When I was 18 I had studied the entire Talmud—but I had no idea that a biblical verse cannot lose its straightforward meaning." Rabbenu Shlomo, **[B]** my maternal grandfather, the enlightener of the eyes of the Diaspora, who wrote commentaries on all parts of the Bible, paid great attention to interpretation of the straightforward sense. Yet when I, Samuel, the son of his son-in-law Meir (may the memory of the righteous be for a blessing), challenged him to his face, he admitted to me that if he had the time he really ought to write additional commentaries to accommodate the new understandings that are being developed day by day. **This, then, is the line of Jacob.** As intelligent people will see, my predecessors, who take the Hebrew to mean "these are the happenings of Jacob," are spouting nonsense. The phrase "these are the *toledot*" is used throughout the Bible to refer to one's "line," sometimes listing the man's sons and sometimes further generations. See my comment to "This is the line of Noah" (6:9). **[C]** We have already read in 5:32 that "when Noah had lived 500 years, Noah begot Shem, Ham, and Japheth," and further that humanity had sinned, "but Noah found favor with the LORD" (6:8). Only after that are we told, "This is the line of Noah" (6:9). There the text tells us how the Holy One commanded him to put his three sons in the ark for 12 months, after which they came forth and "sons were born to them after the Flood" (10:1), eventually amounting to the 70 descendants of theirs who constituted the 70 nations of the world: "From these the maritime nations branched out" (10:5). The same goes for "the line of Esau" (36:1) listing the sons he had while living near his father and the further "line of Esau" (36:9) listing his descendants after moving to Mount Seir; the whole rest of the chapter constitutes that "line." Just so, 35:22–26 tells us about the 12 sons Jacob had in Paddan-aram before returning to his father. So we know where Jacob's sons were born and we know where Esau's sons were born. Now begins the story of "the line of Jacob," his 70 descendants who will go down to Egypt, and how that happened. Joseph's brothers were jealous of him, leading Judah to leave his brothers and raise children in Chezib and Adullam—Shelah, Perez, and Zerah (see ch. 38). Meanwhile, Joseph ended up down in Egypt, where he fathered Manasseh and Ephraim and eventually sent for his father and the rest of the family, 70 in all. Our master Moses had to write all this down so the following chastisement would make sense: "Your ancestors went down to Egypt seventy persons in all; and now the LORD your God has made you as numerous as the stars of heaven" (Deut. 10:22). **At seventeen years of age.** This lets us figure out that he was missing for 22 years before

[B] Rashi. **[C]** We no longer have this comment.

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NJPS Joseph brought bad reports of them to their father. [3]Now Israel loved Joseph best of all his

OJPS of Zilpah, his father's wives; and Joseph brought evil report of them unto their father. [3]Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his

וְאֶת־בְּנֵי זִלְפָּה נְשֵׁי אָבִיו וַיָּבֵא יוֹסֵף
אֶת־דִּבָּתָם רָעָה אֶל־אֲבִיהֶם׃ [3] וְיִשְׂרָאֵל
אָהַב אֶת־יוֹסֵף מִכָּל־בָּנָיו כִּי־בֶן־זְקֻנִים

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ The "calumnies" that Joseph brought to their father (as the Hebrew word is translated elsewhere) pose a problem. Either these reports were true or they were false. If true, they were not calumnies and he should not have been punished for them, as our tradition says he was. If false, he could not have "brought" them but must have created them. ✦ What sense does it make to say that "Israel loved Joseph best of all his sons, for he was the child of his old age" (v. 3)? Again, Issachar and Zebulun too were born in Jacob's old age, and Benjamin was born even after Joseph.

RASHI drew closer to them. **Joseph brought bad reports of them to their father.** "Reports" is just a word of speech; see Song 7:10. But these were bad reports. Anything bad he could find to say about Leah's sons, he would. He would tell his father every fault he found in them: that they would eat the meat of a living animal; **[C]** that they would denigrate the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah by calling them slaves; and that they were suspected of sexual misbehavior. In fact, he was personally repaid for each of these charges. He charged them with eating the flesh of a living animal, but they "slaughtered a kid" (v. 31). He charged them with calling their brothers slaves, and he in turn was "sold into slavery" (Ps. 105:17). As for sexual misbehavior . . . "his master's wife cast her eyes upon Joseph" (39:7).

3 For he was the child of his old age. But Onkelos translates, "he was his sage

[C] This violates one of the seven commandments understood to have been given to all the descendants of Noah, so it was applicable even before the giving of the Torah.

KIMHI and 30:9 say they were given to Jacob "as wife" (see OJPS there). **Joseph brought bad reports of them to their father.** He told him that his brothers hated him—both sets of them. The text goes on to tell us why they hated him.

3 He was the child of his old age. True, Joseph was born last, but Jacob was well along in years when all the boys were born. So the explanation is indeed that he found in

RASHBAM his father, Jacob, saw him again. For "Joseph was thirty years old when he entered the service of Pharaoh" (41:46), after which there were 7 years of plenty and 2 more of famine before his father came down, when there were "yet five years of famine to come" (45:11). **Joseph tended the flocks with his brothers.** "His brothers" naturally means the sons of Leah, not the sons of the maidservants. But being a carefree kid and somewhat irresponsible, he used to wander off and hang out with the sons of the maidservants. **As a helper to the sons of his father's wives Bilhah and Zilpah.** Rather, as "a lad" (OJPS) with them. He got into the habit of spending his time partying with the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, which is why his brothers—the sons of Leah—began to hate him. "Lad" implies "youth," not that he was a "helper": "I fell in love with Israel when he was still a *child*" (Hosea 11:1); "Let the *young men* come forward and sport before us" (2 Sam. 2:14). Joseph is called "a lad" here because the text is enumerating all the reasons his brothers hated him. **And Joseph brought bad reports of them to their father.** As the midrash says (understood in accordance with my own explanation), he told his father, "My brothers are demeaning the sons of the maidservants, but I respect them and spend time with them." Others who interpret in accordance with the straightforward sense of the text have missed this essential point.

3 Now Israel loved Joseph best of all his sons. Another cause of their jealousy. **For he was the child of his old age.** He

NAHMANIDES keeping an eye on him. In that case, the "bad reports" would be about the four of them, and those four would have been the ones who hated him. V. 3, about Israel loving Joseph best, would then come to explain why the rest of the brothers also hated him. **And Joseph brought bad reports of them to their father.** The Hebrew word translated "reports" always refers to telling something bad about someone; calling them "bad" reports adds emphasis to the expression. Rashi thinks the word is neutral, and "bringing" a report just means saying what you saw; "bringing *forth*" a report, on the other hand (as in Prov. 10:18), would refer to a falsehood rather than a true report. Anyway, there is nothing wrong with calling a 17-year-old "a lad." He was the youngest and could not keep up with his big brothers. That is why he had to stay with the sons of the maidservants. Solomon's son Rehoboam too was "inexperienced [literally: a lad] and fainthearted and could not stand up to them" (2 Chron. 13:7), though 2 Chron. 12:13 has already told us that he became king at age 41. Remember David asking, "Is my *boy* Absalom safe?" (2 Sam. 18:32). When Benjamin goes down to Egypt, he will be older than Joseph is now, but he is still called "a lad" many times. Onkelos understands that Joseph was with the sons of the maidservants "from the time he was a boy," meaning that they raised him and took care of him. As far as I am concerned, that fits perfectly with my explanation—that the bad reports were about these four, and the others hated Joseph because they were jealous of his father's love. **His father's wives.** He indeed took them to wife. The text does not refer to them as maidservants except where they are mentioned in connection with Rachel and Leah, who were their mistresses, e.g., 33:2. The same goes for "Reuben went and lay with Bilhah, his father's concubine" (35:22); the word "concubine" is chosen specifically to say that had she not been a maidservant he never would have done this. But it is also possible that Bilhah and Zilpah were referred to as maidservants and concubines during the lifetimes of Rachel and Leah, but now that they were dead Jacob took Bilhah and Zilpah as full-fledged wives.

IBN EZRA making him serve them. Had he served his brothers who were Leah's sons, there would have been nothing wrong with that. The idea that he said Leah's sons had eaten the meat of a living animal is a midrash. The text says nothing about any of his brothers except the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah.

3 For he was the child of his old age. He fathered him at age 91. Joseph's brother Benjamin is also called "a child of his old age" (44:20); no others were born to him

3 For he was the child of his old age. I do not see how Rashi's and Ibn Ezra's comments can be correct. All of Jacob's sons were born in his old age. Issachar and Zebulun cannot have been more than a year or two older than Joseph. But old people pick one of their

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS phrase demonstrates Joseph's humility toward them despite their lower status (Abarbanel). **And Joseph brought bad reports of them to their father.** A "report" can be either good or bad; notice that in Num. 14:37 the spies' report must also be identified specifically as "bad." But as the "whisperings" of Ps. 31:14 show, it usually does refer to something bad. As sons of the maidservants, these four would not have been jealous of Joseph—but they did hate him for these bad reports (Bekhor Shor). Joseph wanted them to improve. Being in town with his father, whenever he heard the people in town saying bad things about his brothers, he reported that to his father—not that he vouched for the accuracy of the rumors, only that he had heard them (Abarbanel).

3 Now Israel loved Joseph best of all his sons. It is impossible for someone with 12 sons to love them all precisely equally

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NJPS sons, for he was the child of his old age; and he had made him an ornamented tunic. 4And when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of his brothers, they hated him so that they could not speak a friendly word to him.

5Once Joseph had a dream which he told to his brothers; and they hated him even more. 6He said to them, "Hear this dream which I have dreamed: 7There we were binding sheaves in the field, when

הוּא לוֹ וְעָשָׂה לוֹ כְּתֹנֶת פַּסִּים׃ 4 וַיִּרְאוּ
אֶחָיו כִּי־אֹתּוֹ אָהַב אֲבִיהֶם מִכָּל־אֶחָיו
וַיִּשְׂנְאוּ אֹתוֹ וְלֹא יָכְלוּ דַּבְּרוֹ לְשָׁלֹם׃
5 וַיַּחֲלֹם יוֹסֵף חֲלוֹם וַיַּגֶּד לְאֶחָיו וַיּוֹסִפוּ
עוֹד שְׂנֹא אֹתוֹ׃ 6 וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵיהֶם שִׁמְעוּ־
נָא הַחֲלוֹם הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר חָלָמְתִּי׃ 7 וְהִנֵּה
אֲנַחְנוּ מְאַלְּמִים אֻלְמִים בְּתוֹךְ הַשָּׂדֶה

RASHI child." Everything Jacob had learned from Shem and Eber he passed on to Joseph. Another reading is to take *zekunim* as an acronym for *ziv ikonin* ("the spit and image"). **He had made.** The ו here does not change the verb from past to future as it commonly does. **An ornamented tunic.** Rather, "a cuffed tunic" (see B. Shab. 10b), with bands of fine wool around the cuff. David's daughter Tamar wears a similar tunic in 2 Sam. 13:18. But the midrash takes פסים too as an acronym, for the troubles that would befall him. He would be sold to Potiphar (פ), to traders (ס, *soḥarim*), to Ishmaelites (י), and to Midianites (מ).

4 They could not speak a friendly word to him. The suffix on the verb here indicates speaking "with" him. From this nasty thing said about them we also learn something in praise of them: they did not say one thing to his face and something else in their hearts.

7 Binding sheaves. Onkelos makes clear what these rare Hebrew words (which both come from the same root) mean; see also the only other verse where any form of this word occurs, Ps. 126:6, as well as B. BM 22b.

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ The verse appears to say that Jacob's love for him was such that "he had made him an ornamented tunic." Can we really believe that the only result of this great love was that Joseph got a nice coat? ✦ Why would his brothers be jealous about a tunic—a gift for a small child? ✦ Couldn't his brothers have afforded such a tunic if they really wanted one? ✦ Why did Jacob create this source of controversy? Wasn't he enough of a prophet to see what would happen? ✦ Why is it that the brothers "hated" Joseph (v. 4)? It was not his fault that Jacob loved him. Let them hate their father, not him. ✦ Why did they "hate" him rather than being jealous of him? ✦ We are told that "they hated him so that they could not speak a friendly word to him." But the Hebrew suffix indicates that the expression is really about *Joseph*'s "speaking." What could this possibly mean? ✦ Why did Joseph, who later proves himself so wise, insist on telling the dream to his brothers (v. 5) when he knew they hated him? ✦ Why did they "hate him even more" for the dream? A person does not decide what to dream.

OJPS children, because he was the son of his old age; and he made him a coat of many colors. 4And when his brethren saw that their father loved him more than all his brethren, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably unto him.

5And Joseph dreamed a dream, and he told it to his brethren; and they hated him yet the more. 6And he said unto them: "Hear, I pray you, this dream which I have dreamed: 7for, behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and, lo, my sheaf

RASHBAM was the last of the first 11 sons; Benjamin was born long afterward. So Joseph was the child of Jacob's old age for a long while before Benjamin was born, and Jacob had begun to love him for that reason. **An ornamented tunic.** A fancy cloak.

IBN EZRA after these two. **An ornamented tunic.** Rather, a "palm-length" one. The equivalent word in Aramaic occurs in "the king could see *the hand* as it wrote" (Dan. 5:5). **[A]**

4 They could not speak a friendly word to him. They literally could not even say "hello" to him.

7 Binding sheaves. "Binding" and "sheaves" come from the same Hebrew root. "Sheaves" has a masculine-looking ending

[A] Ibn Ezra's meaning is unclear and his comment to Dan. 5:5, citing Ps. 12:2 and 72:16, hardly helps. Some texts of Ibn Ezra's comment add that it was an "embroidered" coat.

KIMHI him the wisdom of an elder. **An ornamented tunic.** Rather, "a striped tunic," each stripe being of a different color.

4 They could not speak a friendly word to him. They could not speak to him without quarreling.

5 Once Joseph had a dream which he told to his brothers. To hurt them.

NAHMANIDES youngest children to stay near them and serve them. The old man relies on having the boy with him at all times, and that boy is "the child" of the man's old age because he takes care of him. Jacob picked Joseph for this purpose. That is why Joseph did not go with his brothers when they took the sheep far away; he had to stay with his father. Onkelos is following the rabbinic idea that Jacob taught Joseph all the traditions and secrets of the Torah he had learned from Shem and Eber. He found that Joseph understood everything so intuitively that he seemed wise beyond his years. Note that in 44:20 Onkelos does call Benjamin "a child of his old age." But he has noticed that our text does not say that. Rather, it literally calls Joseph "a son of old age *to him*"—a boy who was old from Jacob's perspective.

7 My sheaf stood up and remained upright; then your sheaves gathered around and bowed low to my sheaf. Joseph was

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS (Abarbanel). **For he was the child of his old age.** He did not have any sons by Rachel until he was old. Having been conceived out of genuine desire, this boy was his favorite (Bekhor Shor). You might argue that Benjamin was born when Jacob was even older. But Jacob's love for Benjamin was less than his love for Joseph, since Benjamin's mother had died giving birth to him (Hizkuni). When he was with his brothers he acted like "a lad," but when he was with his father he was mature beyond his years (Abarbanel). **He had made him an ornamented tunic.** Rather, a tunic with a nice "appearance," as this word is used in rabbinic literature (Bekhor Shor). So that his clothes should be "for dignity and adornment" (Exod. 28:2) by comparison with those of his brothers; as the Sages say, a wise man's clothes should always be clean and good (Abarbanel). Indicating that he was in charge. As Isa. 22:21 puts it, "I will invest him with your tunic, gird him with your sash, and deliver your authority into his hand" (Sforno).

4 And when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of his brothers. "His brothers" the sons of Leah, who felt their status made them as deserving of Jacob's love as Joseph was (Bekhor Shor). **They hated him.** All of them—Leah's sons out of jealousy and the others because of the bad reports (Bekhor Shor). The lowly do not recognize the merit of those higher than them. And though Jacob did not say so, they were sure the bad reports he confronted them with were coming from Joseph. But they were also convinced that he, as Rachel's first-born, would inherit the promise, and that they, like Ishmael and Esau, would be sent away (Abarbanel).

6 Hear this dream which I have dreamed. He wanted them to realize that if he rose to greatness, it would not be because of his father but with the help of heaven (Hizkuni). He was hoping they would be able to interpret it for him. Friends do tell each other their dreams. But they may well have assumed that he merely invented these dreams to annoy them (Abarbanel).

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NJPS suddenly my sheaf stood up and remained upright; then your sheaves gathered around and bowed low to my sheaf." [8]His brothers answered, "Do you mean to reign over us? Do you mean to rule over us?" And they hated him even more for his talk about his dreams.

[9]He dreamed another dream and told it to his brothers, saying, "Look, I have had another dream: And this time, the sun, the moon, and eleven stars were bowing down to me." [10]And when he told it to his father and brothers, his father berated him. "What," he said to him, "is this dream you have dreamed? Are we to come, I and your mother and your brothers, and bow low to

וְהִנֵּה קָמָה אֲלֻמָּתִי וְגַם־נִצָּבָה וְהִנֵּה
תְסֻבֶּינָה אֲלֻמֹּתֵיכֶם וַתִּשְׁתַּחֲוֶיןָ לַאֲלֻמָּתִי׃
8 וַיֹּאמְרוּ לוֹ אֶחָיו הֲמָלֹךְ תִּמְלֹךְ עָלֵינוּ
אִם־מָשׁוֹל תִּמְשֹׁל בָּנוּ וַיּוֹסִפוּ עוֹד שְׂנֹא
אֹתוֹ עַל־חֲלֹמֹתָיו וְעַל־דְּבָרָיו׃
9 וַיַּחֲלֹם עוֹד חֲלוֹם אַחֵר וַיְסַפֵּר אֹתוֹ
לְאֶחָיו וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּה חָלַמְתִּי חֲלוֹם עוֹד
וְהִנֵּה הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ וְהַיָּרֵחַ וְאַחַד עָשָׂר כּוֹכָבִים
מִשְׁתַּחֲוִים לִי׃ 10 וַיְסַפֵּר אֶל־אָבִיו וְאֶל־
אֶחָיו וַיִּגְעַר־בּוֹ אָבִיו וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ מָה
הַחֲלוֹם הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר חָלָמְתָּ הֲבוֹא נָבוֹא
אֲנִי וְאִמְּךָ וְאַחֶיךָ לְהִשְׁתַּחֲוֹת לְךָ אָרְצָה׃

OJPS arose, and also stood upright; and, behold, your sheaves came round about, and bowed down to my sheaf." [8]And his brethren said to him: "Shalt thou indeed reign over us? or shalt thou indeed have dominion over us?" And they hated him yet the more for his dreams, and for his words.

[9]And he dreamed yet another dream, and told it to his brethren, and said: "Behold, I have dreamed yet a dream: and, behold, the sun and the moon and eleven stars bowed down to me." [10]And he told it to his father, and to his brethren; and his father rebuked him, and said unto him: "What is this dream that thou hast dreamed? Shall I and thy mother and thy brethren indeed come to bow down to

RASHI **8 For his talk about his dreams.** Rather, "for his dreams, and for his words" (OJPS)—the words being the bad reports he brought to their father.

10 When he told it to his father and brothers. After telling it to his brothers in v. 9, he told it to his father in front of them. **His father berated him.** For bringing hatred upon himself. **Are we to come, I and your mother and your brothers, and bow low to you to the ground?** Wasn't Joseph's mother already dead? What Jacob did not realize was that the moon in this dream represented Bilhah, who had raised Joseph like her own child. The Sages learn from this episode that there is no dream that does not include something random. Jacob was simply trying to get his sons to stop taking the dream seriously so they would not be "wrought

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Then we are told that "they hated him even more for his talk about his dreams" (v. 8). Why are we told three times that they hated him, but not that they hated him for the "bad reports" of v. 2, which would be a much more plausible explanation for their hate? ✦ Why does the text say that he "told [the second dream] to his brothers" (v. 9) and then repeat that "he told it to his father and brothers" (v. 10)?

RASHBAM **8 For his talk.** The "bad reports" (v. 2).

10 What is this dream? Even if Joseph's mother had been living, Jacob would have said this to reproach him.

KIMHI **8 His dreams.** Perhaps he had a dream of this kind previously without the text mentioning it.

9 He dreamed another dream. Clearly the dreams in the Joseph story, like the dreams of Nebuchadnezzar and of Gideon, **[A]** contain a large element of prophecy, provided by God for the sake of His servants.

10 He told it to his father. Who was in this dream, as opposed to the previous one.

[A] See Daniel 2 and Judges 7 respectively.

IBN EZRA here but a feminine-looking one in Ps. 126:6. **Gathered around.** This is a geminate verb, which explains the *dagesh* in the ב.

8 Do you mean to reign over us? Do you expect us to crown you king over us? **Do you mean to rule over us?** Do you expect to rule us by force?

10 His father berated him. When the verb is used with preposition *be-* (as here), it means "to berate"; with *le-* (as in Mal. 2:3), it means "to destroy." Or perhaps it is a metaphor there, and the threat is "to berate your seed" so that it is too frightened to come up. **I and your mother.** Meaning Bilhah, his mother's maidservant, who raised him.

NAHMANIDES shown in his dream that sheaves of grain would be the cause of his brothers bowing down to him. And they are not merely bowing; they are "gathered around," leaving him "like a king expecting a siege" (Job 15:24), whose servants "encamp around his tent" (Job 19:12).

8 Do you mean to reign over us? Do you mean to rule over us? The translations, following Onkelos, make more sense here than Ibn Ezra's explanation. They are telling Joseph, "You will never be our king or rule over us in any way." **For his talk about his dreams.** They hated his bragging about them: "Hear this dream which I have dreamed" (v. 6).

10 When he told it to his father. He told this dream, unlike the first one, to his father. For Joseph understood the interpretation of the dream quite well: The "sun" was his father. That is why Jacob rebuked him. **And brothers.** A second time, having told it to his father in front of them. This was another reason for Jacob to rebuke him—to calm their anger. **What is this dream you have dreamed?** Compare "what is man that You should care about him" (Ps. 144:3). Jacob was saying, "Why are you telling us this pointless dream?" Or Jacob may be rebuking him for his vanity and immaturity, telling him that the thoughts he had been entertaining during the day "came to your mind in your bed" (Dan. 2:29). **Are we to come, I and your mother?** Despite Rashi's comment about the moon that bowed to Joseph standing for Bilhah, I think that by the time they went down to Egypt Bilhah (and Zilpah too) had died. We are told about "the persons belonging to Jacob who came to Egypt—his own issue, aside from the wives of Jacob's sons" (46:26). But it does not say "aside from his own wives." You might argue that that verse did not want to say "aside from his own concubines," but of course our v. 2 has already called them his "wives." It is quite implausible that the moon should represent a concubine. Here is what the dream meant: The sun symbolized Jacob. The moon symbolized all the rest of his household and his descendants. And indeed all 70 of them did bow down

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **9 The sun, the moon, and eleven stars were bowing down to me.** I stood all the way to the east, and the stars were rotating west as they normally do. But the sun, the moon, and 11 stars reversed course, moved back east, and came down to earth as if bowing before me. Your astrological signs were subordinated to mine. — Since all the world needs the sun and moon, Joseph realized that one day all the world would need him and bow to him (Bekhor Shor).

10 I and your mother and your brothers. I, who am your father; your mother, who is dead; and your brothers, who hate you?! (Abarbanel).

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NJPS you to the ground?" 11So his brothers were wrought up at him, and his father kept the matter in mind.

12One time, when his brothers had gone to pasture their father's flock at Shechem, 13Israel said to Joseph, "Your brothers are pasturing at Shechem. Come, I will send you to them." He answered, "I am ready." 14And he said to him, "Go and see how your brothers are and how the flocks are faring, and bring me back word." So he sent him from the valley of Hebron.

OJPS thee to the earth?" 11And his brethren envied him; but his father kept the saying in mind.

12And his brethren went to feed their father's flock in Shechem. 13And Israel said unto Joseph: "Do not thy brethren feed the flock in Shechem? come, and I will send thee unto them." And he said to him: "Here am I." 14And he said to him: "Go now, see whether it is well with thy brethren, and well with the flock; and bring me back word." So he sent him out of the vale of Hebron,

11 וַיְקַנְאוּ־בוֹ אֶחָיו וְאָבִיו שָׁמַר אֶת־
הַדָּבָר׃ שני
12 וַיֵּלְכוּ אֶחָיו לִרְעוֹת אֶת־צֹאן אֲבִיהֶם
בִּשְׁכֶם׃ 13 וַיֹּאמֶר יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶל־יוֹסֵף הֲלוֹא
אַחֶיךָ רֹעִים בִּשְׁכֶם לְכָה וְאֶשְׁלָחֲךָ אֲלֵיהֶם
וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ הִנֵּנִי׃ 14 וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ לֶךְ־נָא רְאֵה
אֶת־שְׁלוֹם אַחֶיךָ וְאֶת־שְׁלוֹם הַצֹּאן
וַהֲשִׁבֵנִי דָּבָר וַיִּשְׁלָחֵהוּ מֵעֵמֶק חֶבְרוֹן

v. 12. נקוד על א׳ ת׳

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why after the second dream were his brothers "wrought up at him" (v. 11) rather than hating him? ✦ How could the brothers be "pasturing at Shechem" (v. 13) after what had happened there? ✦ Why did Jacob send Joseph to his brothers on this particular day? ✦ Wasn't he afraid they would harm Joseph? ✦ Wasn't Joseph himself afraid of going?

RASHI up" at Joseph. "Is your mother, who is dead, going to bow low to you? And the whole rest of the dream is equally nonsensical."

11 His father kept the matter in mind. To "keep" in this sense means to take a wait-and-see attitude. Compare "a nation that keeps faith" (Isa. 26:2); "keep watch over my sin" (Job 14:16).

12 His brothers had gone to pasture their father's flock. Notice the dots over the two letters of את, the direct object marker. They had not gone to "feed" (OJPS) anyone but themselves.

13 I am ready. Ready, willing, and able. The Hebrew implies that he is putting himself at his father's service, and that he will act with alacrity on his father's instructions—despite the fact that he knew his brothers hated him.

14 So he sent him from the valley of Hebron. Isn't Hebron on a height? Notice that the spies "went *up* into the Negeb and came to Hebron" (Num. 13:22). Read our phrase, therefore, to say that he sent him from consideration of the deep thoughts of the righteous man who is buried in Hebron, that is, to fulfill what was said to Abraham during the

RASHBAM **11 His father kept the matter in mind**. What need was there to write this? When, eventually, his sons brought the news that Joseph was still alive, Jacob did not believe it. But "when he saw the wagons that Pharaoh had sent to transport him" (45:27)—that verse actually says Joseph sent them, but see v. 21—then Jacob believed them. For he remembered these dreams that proved Joseph would end up as a ruler. The wagons were clearly arriving on orders from the royal government. That memory is what led Jacob to say, "Enough! My son Joseph is still alive!" (45:28). You must understand how surprising it was for Jacob to believe that his son was still alive after seeing his cloak soaked with blood. It was a shock equal to the one Isaac had when he realized the hairy man whose neck he had felt was not Esau but Jacob, and he was "seized with very violent trembling" (27:33).

13 Your brothers are pasturing at Shechem. In a place of danger, where they had killed the men of the place. — I heard this comment from our colleague Joseph Kara and appreciated it.

14 When he reached Shechem. And did not find them.

KIMHI **11 His father kept the matter in mind**. Despite having berated him about the dream, he was worried about it.

12 At Shechem. They were not worried about the men of Shechem; they had killed them all. As for the neighboring cities, "a terror from God" (35:5) had fallen upon them, and Jacob's sons trusted in God. Moreover, it had been a long time and the matter might have been forgotten.

13 Your brothers are pasturing at Shechem. As you know. **I am ready**. He was confident that his brothers feared their father enough not to harm him. His father was likewise not worried; if he had been, he never would have sent him.

14 So he sent him from the valley of Hebron. Jacob accompanied him from the city as far as this nearby valley and sent him off from there.

IBN EZRA **11 His father kept the matter in mind**. "In mind" is not in the Hebrew—but that is most certainly the implication. That is also the correct translation in Ps. 99:7, not "they obeyed His decrees."

13 He answered, "I am ready." The literal "Here am I" (OJPS) means "I will do what you ask," as NJPS translates here.

NAHMANIDES to Joseph when they came to Egypt. The 11 stars symbolized Joseph's brothers, who bowed to him separately, before their father came to Egypt: "When Joseph came home, they presented to him the gifts that they had brought with them into the house, bowing low before him to the ground" (43:26).

14 So he sent him from the valley of Hebron. The text is telling us where he sent him from to let us know that they were a long distance away. That is why they dared to do evil to him— they were so far away from their father. It also tells us what kind of effort Joseph was prepared to exert in going after them. He does not say, "How can I go? They all hate me." A midrash takes "the valley of Hebron [*emek ḥebron*]" as hinting at the deep (*amok*) design of which God had informed his *ḥaber na'eh*, his "good friend" Abraham, who was buried in Hebron.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **11 So his brothers were wrought up at him**. They no longer hated him, but "envied him" (OJPS); once the dream occurred a second time, they began to suspect that it was true (Abarbanel).

12 Their father's flock. The direct-object marker that introduces this phrase is one of the 15 places in the Bible with dots over the letters (Masorah). **At Shechem**. Far enough away that they did not think Joseph would be able to bring bad reports of them to their father. And given that they were surrounded there by enemies, if Joseph came there, they might be able to kill Joseph and claim the enemies had done it (Abarbanel).

13 Your brothers are pasturing at Shechem. Teasing him: "Your brothers are pasturing at Shechem, and here you are sitting around the house!" (Abarbanel). They are at Shechem, which is not too far from here (Sforno).

14 Go and see how your brothers are. More precisely, "Go, please, and see how your brothers are." Even though I hear from them every day, it is right that you should go and see how they are; after all, they are your brothers (Hizkuni). He was afraid that the locals

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NJPS When he reached Shechem, [15]a man came upon him wandering in the fields. The man asked him, "What are you looking for?" [16]He answered, "I am looking for my brothers. Could you tell me where they are pasturing?" [17]The man said, "They have gone from here, for I heard them say: Let us go to Dothan." So Joseph followed his brothers and found them at Dothan.

[18]They saw him from afar, and before he came close to them they conspired to

OJPS and he came to Shechem. [15]And a certain man found him, and, behold, he was wandering in the field. And the man asked him, saying: "What seekest thou?" [16]And he said: "I seek my brethren. Tell me, I pray thee, where they are feeding the flock." [17]And the man said: "They are departed hence; for I heard them say: Let us go to Dothan." And Joseph went after his brethren, and found them in Dothan.

[18]And they saw him afar off, and before he came near unto them, they conspired

וַיָּבֹא שְׁכֶמָה׃ 15 וַיִּמְצָאֵהוּ אִישׁ וְהִנֵּה תֹּעֶה בַּשָּׂדֶה וַיִּשְׁאָלֵהוּ הָאִישׁ לֵאמֹר מַה־תְּבַקֵּשׁ׃ 16 וַיֹּאמֶר אֶת־אַחַי אָנֹכִי מְבַקֵּשׁ הַגִּידָה־נָּא לִי אֵיפֹה הֵם רֹעִים׃ 17 וַיֹּאמֶר הָאִישׁ נָסָעוּ מִזֶּה כִּי שָׁמַעְתִּי אֹמְרִים נֵלְכָה דֹתָיְנָה וַיֵּלֶךְ יוֹסֵף אַחַר אֶחָיו וַיִּמְצָאֵם בְּדֹתָן׃ 18 וַיִּרְאוּ אֹתוֹ מֵרָחֹק וּבְטֶרֶם יִקְרַב אֲלֵיהֶם

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ What is the point of telling us about the episode when the man found him wandering and told him where the brothers had gone (vv. 15–17)? ✦ Having at last "conspired to kill him" (v. 18), why did they not simply murder him and bury him in the sand? Instead, they sent him down to Egypt, and everything they were hoping to avoid came true.

RASHI "covenant between the pieces": "Know well that your offspring shall be strangers in a land not theirs" (15:13). **He reached Shechem.** A place that B. Sanh. 102a calls "predestined for evil." That is where Jacob's sons disgraced themselves; that is where Dinah was abused; and that is where David's kingdom was split: "Rehoboam went to Shechem, for all Israel had come to Shechem to acclaim him as king" (1 Kings 12:1).

15 A man came upon him. Gabriel, who is called "the man Gabriel" in Dan. 9:21.

17 They have gone from here. Literally, "they have departed from this"—from this brotherly feeling that you are displaying. **Let us go to Dothan.** To find some loopholes in the laws (*dathoth*) by means of which they can have you put to death. — But the straightforward sense is of course that Dothan is just a name. The straightforward sense of a biblical verse can never be dismissed.

18 They conspired. Literally, "they filled themselves with trickery." NJPS omits the next word, literally "with him," which OJPS correctly understands in context as "with *regard to* him," that is, "against him."

KIMHI **15 Wandering in the fields.** Having not found them at the pasturelands of Shechem, he was walking hither and thither in search of them.

NAHMANIDES **15 A man came upon him wandering in the fields.** That is, he had wandered off the road and did not know where to go. He was in the fields because he was looking for somewhere they might have pastured the sheep. The text is giving us all these details to let us know that he might well have given up and gone home, but he put up with everything out of respect for his father. We are further being informed that man's plans may prove false, but God's decrees always come to pass. The Holy One provided this unwitting guide to deliver Joseph into his brothers' hands. That is what our Sages meant when they called such people "angels." They were saying that this was no coincidence. "Many designs are in a man's mind, but it is the LORD's plan that is accomplished" (Prov. 19:21).

17 They have gone from here. See Rashi's comment. The Sages, of course, did not mean that this stranger told Joseph his brothers had abandoned their brotherly feelings for him; if he had, Joseph would not have put himself in danger. What they meant was that this "Gabriel" told him something permitting two interpretations, both of them true. Joseph acted according to the superficial meaning of the words, but he did not understand their hidden meaning. He did, after all, find his brothers in Dothan where the man had told him they would be. Being an "angel," the man could just as easily have told Joseph, "Your brothers are in Dothan." Instead, he said, "They have gone from here," adding that he had heard them say they were going to Dothan. That is why the Sages created this midrash. **For I heard them say.** The Hebrew might well be translated, "I heard some people saying"—perhaps they were your brothers? (He was speaking as if he did not want to get involved.)

18 Before he came close to them they conspired to kill him. That is, they conspired to kill him by trickery before he came close, so they would not have to spill his blood with their own hands. This explains the story in Genesis Rabbah that they said, "Let's sic the dogs on him!" They may in fact have tried something of the kind but failed. When he got so close that a trick of that kind was no longer an option, they simply said to one another, "Come now, let us kill him" ourselves (v. 20).

RASHBAM **15 A man came upon him wandering in the fields.** This tells us how thoughtful Joseph was. He did not want to go back to his father having not found them at Shechem, but looked for them until he found them. Even though he knew they were jealous of him, he went on looking for them, as his father had told him to do: "Bring me back word" (v. 14).

17 At Dothan. The straightforward sense is indeed that this was the name of the town; it is also mentioned in 2 Kings 6:13. **[D]**

18 They conspired. For this unusual root, compare "the *trickery* they *practiced* against you" (Num. 25:18); "a curse on the *cheat* who has an unblemished male in his flock, but for his vow sacrifices a blemished animal" (Mal. 1:14).

[D] Our text of Rashbam's commentary says "in Judges."

IBN EZRA **15 A man came upon him.** The straightforward sense is that this was some passerby.

16 Could you tell me where they are pasturing? Again, the Hebrew is literally the command "tell me," but the obvious implication is "if you know."

17 Let us go to Dothan . . . at Dothan. The fact that the first Dothan is spelled with a י and the second without is of no consequence. They are both the same place.

18 They conspired. They schemed to do evil. The verb focuses on their evil thoughts.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS would do them some harm (Gersonides). Go see what you can do to set things right with them. — For Jacob could have sent a servant to find out how they were (Sforno).

15 Wandering in the fields. Because he did not know which part of town they were in (Gersonides). **What are you looking for?** Implying—though Joseph did not catch on—"Are you looking for trouble?" (Abarbanel).

17 I heard them say: Let us go to Dothan. I did not see them go, but I heard them saying this (Sforno).

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NJPS kill him. [19]They said to one another, "Here comes that dreamer! [20]Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits; and we can say, 'A savage beast devoured him.' We shall see what comes of his dreams!" [21]But when Reuben heard it, he tried to save him from them. He said, "Let us not take his life." [22]And Reuben went on, "Shed no blood! Cast him into that pit out in the wilderness, but do not touch him yourselves"—intending to save

וַיִּתְנַכְּלוּ אֹתוֹ לַהֲמִיתֻוֹ׃ 19 וַיֹּאמְרוּ אִישׁ
אֶל־אָחִיו הִנֵּה בַּעַל הַחֲלֹמוֹת הַלָּזֶה בָּא׃
20 וְעַתָּה ׀ לְכוּ וְנַהַרְגֵהוּ וְנַשְׁלִכֵהוּ בְּאַחַד
הַבֹּרוֹת וְאָמַרְנוּ חַיָּה רָעָה אֲכָלָתְהוּ
וְנִרְאֶה מַה־יִּהְיוּ חֲלֹמֹתָיו׃ 21 וַיִּשְׁמַע
רְאוּבֵן וַיַּצִּלֵהוּ מִיָּדָם וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא נַכֶּנּוּ
נָפֶשׁ׃ 22 וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם ׀ רְאוּבֵן אַל־
תִּשְׁפְּכוּ־דָם הַשְׁלִיכוּ אֹתוֹ אֶל־הַבּוֹר הַזֶּה
אֲשֶׁר בַּמִּדְבָּר וְיָד אַל־תִּשְׁלְחוּ־בוֹ לְמַעַן

OJPS against him to slay him. [19]And they said one to another: "Behold, this dreamer cometh. [20]Come now therefore, and let us slay him, and cast him into one of the pits, and we will say: An evil beast hath devoured him; and we shall see what will become of his dreams." [21]And Reuben heard it, and delivered him out of their hand; and said: "Let us not take his life." [22]And Reuben said unto them: "Shed no blood; cast him into this pit that is in the wilderness, but lay no hand upon him"—that he might deliver him out of their

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ First they said, "let us kill him" (v. 20); but in v. 21 they agreed with Reuben when he said, "Let us not take his life." Then in v. 27 they went with Plan C, when Judah suggested, "Let us sell him to the Ishmaelites." Why couldn't they make up their minds? ✦ What did Reuben intend when he told them, "Cast him into that pit out in the wilderness, but do not touch him yourselves" (v. 22)? As long as he died, they would be murderers, whether or not they killed him directly.

RASHI **20 We shall see what comes of his dreams!** Said R. Isaac: This verse demands, "Expound me!" It is the text itself, the Holy Spirit, saying, "Fine! You say, 'Let us kill him'? We shall see what comes of his dreams! Let's see whose word comes to pass, yours or Mine." The text demands this interpretation because it is impossible to take those words as being said by the brothers; if they kill him, his dreams are obviously canceled.

21 Let us not take his life. More literally, "let us not strike him a mortal [blow]."

22 Intending to save him from them and restore him to his father. The Hebrew might be read as if Reuben himself were adding, "To save him from them." But of course it is in fact the Holy Spirit testifying that Reuben only told them to throw Joseph in the pit so he could get him out of there. He thought, "I am the first-born, the oldest of them. This whole mess will be pinned on me."

KIMHI **22 Shed no blood!** It would be innocent blood. He does not deserve to die. As much as he hurt you with his dreams, you hurt him too. **Cast him into that pit.** As the continuation proves, Reuben did not intend even this to hurt Joseph; it was part of his plan to restore him to his father.

RASHBAM **19 Here comes that dreamer!** The word *lazeh* is always "that," the far demonstrative: "Who is *that* man walking in the field toward us?" (24:65). Contrast regular *zeh*, which is "this," the near demonstrative: "This evil Haman!" (Esther 7:6).

20 Come now, let us kill him. "Come now" is *lekhu*, literally "go" in the Hebrew. But this is indeed the idiom for inviting people to do something; see v. 27 as well. This can also be expressed with the words *hava* (e.g., 38:16 and Exod. 1:10) and *re'eh* (e.g., Deut. 11:26).

21 He tried to save him from them. From being killed by them.

22 Cast him into that pit out in the wilderness. Somewhere people do not go. He will die on his own. **Intending to save him.** This is the narrator confirming that Reuben's intentions were to save him, as v. 29 will demonstrate.

NAHMANIDES **20 We shall see what comes of his dreams!** They were being sarcastic. "Once he's dead, let's see whether we bow down to him!" But I actually think they meant the remark seriously. "Now we will see what comes of his dreams. If God saves him from us, he will surely reign over us." But our Sages, who do take it sarcastically, put this entire comment in the mouth of the Holy Spirit.

IBN EZRA **21 Let us not take his life.** As in Exod. 33:11, the Hebrew phrase uses a noun as if it were an adverb: "let us not strike him life[wise]."

22 Shed no blood! He is saying, "I put up with you when you tried to have him killed by trickery. I hate him too, and would be happy enough if someone else killed him. But you, God forbid, must not spill his blood with your own hands." Reuben's intent, of course, was to save him and bring him back to his father. The text gives us only these few words, but he had already been arguing with them for quite a while, as is clear from what he says later: "Did I not tell you, 'Do no wrong to the boy'? But you paid no heed" (42:22). Our story picks up at that point. Seeing that they paid no heed, he says, "Shed no blood!" Notice that he does not say, "Do not shed *his* blood," which might make it sound as if he were concerned with Joseph. Instead, he tells them not to become "shedders of blood," incidentally teaching them that the punishment for causing a death indirectly is less than that for shedding blood with one's own hands. **That pit out in the wilderness.** It is so deep that he will not be able to climb out of it. And since it is in the wilderness, where no one passes by, he can scream all he likes and no one will save him.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **19 That dreamer.** The unusual word for "that" also occurs only in 24:65 (Masorah). It is a word meaning "hither," as opposed to "thither" (Hizkuni).

20 Come now, let us kill him. They were convinced he had come to do them harm and remove them from the blessing. Remember that they were completely righteous men, whose names would be on "the shoulder-pieces of the ephod . . . for remembrance of the Israelite people" (Exod. 28:12). How could such righteous men do what they did? They were convinced Joseph himself intended to kill them, and were trying to prevent that (Sforno).

21 But when Reuben heard it, he tried to save him from them. Said the Holy One: Since he was the first to try to save a life, the first of the cities of refuge (per Deut. 4:43) will be "Bezer, in the wilderness in the Tableland, belonging to the Reubenites" (Hizkuni). He thought he might be able to make up in this way for the Bilhah incident (Abarbanel). **Let us not take his life.** Reuben realized that if he said, "I'll turn you in!" they would kill him too. So he deliberately put himself in with them: not "do not take his life," but "let *us* not take his life" (Bekhor Shor). He wanted them not to fall into the trap of taking a hasty decision that would lead them down the wrong path, as even a righteous person may sometimes do; Reuben himself had done it in the case of Bilhah (Sforno).

22 Intending to save him from them and restore him to his father. In case you are wondering how he intended to save him by casting him into a pit with snakes and scorpions, you should know that there weren't any snakes in this first pit. But when Reuben left, the brothers threw Joseph into a pit where there *were* snakes. The pit to which Reuben returns in v. 29 is this first pit (Hizkuni).

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NJPS him from them and restore him to his father. 23When Joseph came up to his brothers, they stripped Joseph of his tunic, the ornamented tunic that he was wearing, 24and took him and cast him into the pit. The pit was empty; there was no water in it.

25Then they sat down to a meal. Looking up, they saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead, their camels bearing

OJPS hand, to restore him to his father. 23And it came to pass, when Joseph was come unto his brethren, that they stripped Joseph of his coat, the coat of many colors that was on him; 24and they took him, and cast him into the pit—and the pit was empty, there was no water in it.

25And they sat down to eat bread; and they lifted up their eyes and looked, and, behold, a caravan of Ishmaelites came from Gilead, with their camels bearing spicery

הַצֹּרִי אֹתוֹ מִיָּדָם לַהֲשִׁיבוֹ אֶל־אָבִיו׃
23 וַיְהִי כַּאֲשֶׁר־בָּא יוֹסֵף אֶל־אֶחָיו וַיַּפְשִׁיטוּ
אֶת־יוֹסֵף אֶת־כָּתְּנְתּוֹ אֶת־כְּתֹנֶת הַפַּסִּים
אֲשֶׁר עָלָיו׃ 24 וַיִּקָּחֻהוּ וַיַּשְׁלִכוּ אֹתוֹ הַבֹּרָה
וְהַבּוֹר רֵק אֵין בּוֹ מָיִם׃
25 וַיֵּשְׁבוּ לֶאֱכָל־לָחֶם וַיִּשְׂאוּ עֵינֵיהֶם
וַיִּרְאוּ וְהִנֵּה אֹרְחַת יִשְׁמְעֵאלִים בָּאָה
מִגִּלְעָד וּגְמַלֵּיהֶם נֹשְׂאִים נְכֹאת וּצְרִי וָלֹט

RASHI **23 His tunic.** That is, his shirt, the same kind that they all wore. **The ornamented tunic.** This was the extra garment, the cuffed tunic, that his father had given only to him and not to his brothers.

24 The pit was empty; there was no water in it. Once you tell me that it was empty, do I not understand that there was no water in it? The implication is: there was no water in it, but there were snakes and scorpions in it.

25 A caravan. Onkelos explains the Hebrew word, which derives from the "road" traveled by wayfarers. **Their camels bearing gum, balm, and ladanum.** Why does the text bother to tell us what they were carrying? To let us know how great is the reward given to the righteous. Ordinarily Arab traders of this kind would be carrying naphtha and fuel oil, which smell bad. But for Joseph it was arranged that the caravans should be carrying

RASHBAM **23 The ornamented tunic.** To remind you that it was the cause of their hatred in the first place? Not so. It is mentioned because in v. 32 they will send it to Jacob to trick him into thinking Joseph had been eaten by a wild animal.

24 There was no water in it. Had there been water in it, they would not have cast him into it. For that would have drowned him and therefore they themselves would have directly caused his death, contradicting "do not touch him yourselves" (v. 22).

IBN EZRA **23 They stripped Joseph of his tunic.** A Hiphil verb can take two objects, as does this one: They forced *him* to strip *the tunic* off himself. The "tunic" of Biblical Hebrew is a garment that is worn next to the skin. That is, they stripped him naked and cast him naked into the pit.

25 Then they sat down to a meal. The nine brothers sat down. **[B] Gum.** According to Moses Gikatilla, this is a pleasant substance of some kind. Hezekiah's "treasure-house" of 2 Kings 20:13 is presumably the same word, since א and ו, as quiescent

[B] The two missing brothers are presumably Reuben and Benjamin.

KIMHI **24 And took him.** The verb is plural—but, without the vowel points, the consonants can be read as a singular verb: "*he* took him." Genesis Rabbah asks: Who took him? Simeon. In return for which, Joseph later "took Simeon from among them and had him bound before their eyes" (42:24). **The pit was empty; there was no water in it.** We are told that it was "empty" because, despite having no water, there might have been mud in it, as happened to Jeremiah: "There was no water in the pit, only mud, and Jeremiah sank into the mud" (Jer. 38:6). This would not have killed him, of course—but the snakes and scorpions of the midrash might have. If that midrash is so, the brothers would not have been innocent of his blood. They could not count on God's performing a miracle for him.

NAHMANIDES **24 The pit was empty; there was no water in it.** They have already decided they are not willing to be responsible for drowning him. If Rashi (citing rabbinic literature) is correct about the snakes and scorpions, either they were in holes in the pit or it was so deep that the brothers did not know they were there. If they had seen the snakes and scorpions and noticed that they were doing Joseph no harm, it would have been clear to them that a great miracle had been done for him. They would have realized that he was so righteous that his own merit would rescue him from all evil. How could they lay hands on the Lord's anointed, in whom He delighted? He would certainly save him: "My God sent His angel, who shut the mouths of the lions so that they did not injure me, inasmuch as I was found innocent by Him" (Dan. 6:23). So they clearly did not know about these snakes and scorpions. The straightforward sense, in any case, is that the pit was not merely empty but actually dry. For even a pit with a little bit of water in it could be considered empty. The second statement clarifies and emphasizes the first, as in "you are going to die; you will not get well" (2 Kings 20:1).

25 They saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead. When they noticed them, at some distance away coming from the direction of Gilead, they realized from the camels that it must be a caravan of Ishmaelites, part of the trade in balm between that region and Egypt. That is the point of Judah's remark in v. 27: "These people are *from* far away, and they are *going* somewhere far away. If we sell him to them, no one will ever know what happened." When they came closer, the brothers discovered that they were Midianite gum and ladanum merchants, who had leased the camels from some Ishmaelites. The brothers sold him to these Midianites, who bought him as merchandise. The Ishmaelites who leased the camels did not deal in other merchandise and would not have bought him for themselves. When the brothers sold Joseph "to the Ishmaelites" (v. 28), it just means that they turned him over to the Ishmaelites who were running the caravan. The same applies when Potiphar bought Joseph from "the Ishmaelites who had brought him there" (39:1)—the Ishmaelites were handling him, but the Midianites were Joseph's owners; it was they who "sold him in Egypt to Potiphar" (v. 36). The Bible regularly switches back and forth between the one who is actually doing something and the one who is having it done. So "the marvelous deeds that the LORD performed" (Deut. 11:7) are later called "the great might and awesome power that Moses displayed"

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **23 They stripped Joseph of his tunic.** They tricked him into taking it off (Gersonides).

24 The pit was empty; there was no water in it. That is, it was empty of water. That does not mean there was nothing else in the pit (Gersonides).

25 Then they sat down to a meal. As shepherds do: some eat, while the others watch the animals, after which they switch. They would not all eat at the same time. So Judah was eating with a few of the brothers while Reuben and some of the others were keeping an eye on the sheep. That is why Reuben did not realize Joseph had been sold. As for the idea that it was Reuben's day to serve Jacob—how could he get there and back in a single day? (Bekhor Shor). They sat down far enough away that they could not hear him screaming

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NJPS gum, balm, and ladanum to be taken to Egypt. 26Then Judah said to his brothers, "What do we gain by killing our brother and covering up his blood? 27Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, but let us not do away with him ourselves. After all, he is our brother, our own flesh." His brothers agreed. 28When Midianite traders passed by, they pulled Joseph up

הוֹלְכִים לְהוֹרִיד מִצְרָיְמָה׃ 26 וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוּדָה אֶל־אֶחָיו מַה־בֶּצַע כִּי נַהֲרֹג אֶת־ אָחִינוּ וְכִסִּינוּ אֶת־דָּמוֹ׃ 27 לְכוּ וְנִמְכְּרֶנּוּ לַיִּשְׁמְעֵאלִים וְיָדֵנוּ אַל־תְּהִי־בוֹ כִּי־אָחִינוּ בְשָׂרֵנוּ הוּא וַיִּשְׁמְעוּ אֶחָיו׃ 28 וַיַּעַבְרוּ אֲנָשִׁים מִדְיָנִים סֹחֲרִים וַיִּמְשְׁכוּ וַיַּעֲלוּ אֶת־יוֹסֵף מִן־הַבּוֹר וַיִּמְכְּרוּ אֶת־יוֹסֵף

OJPS and balm and ladanum, going to carry it down to Egypt. 26And Judah said unto his brethren: "What profit is it if we slay our brother and conceal his blood? 27Come, and let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let not our hand be upon him; for he is our brother, our flesh." And his brethren hearkened unto him. 28And there passed by Midianites, merchantmen; and they drew and lifted up Joseph out of

RASHI only sweet-smelling products. "Gum" is better translated as "spicery" (OJPS); the Hebrew word refers to a mixture of spices. A variant of the word is used when Hezekiah shows off "his treasure-house" (2 Kings 20:13), which contains not only silver and gold but "spices" and "fragrant oil." (Onkelos, however, takes our word to mean "wax.") **[D]** "Balm" is a resin that one gets by tapping trees; this particular resin was "stacte" (Exod. 30:34). "Ladanum" is *lot* in Biblical Hebrew but *lotus* in rabbinic Hebrew; see B. Nid. 8a. According to my teachers, this is birthwort.

26 What do we gain. Literally, "What profit?" (OJPS)—as Onkelos translates, "What money?" **And covering up his blood.** That is, concealing his death.

27 His brothers agreed. The Hebrew idiom is that they "hearkened" (OJPS) or "heard." When the verb simply means "to hear" (with the ear), Onkelos uses the same root in Aramaic; but when it means "to agree," Onkelos uses a different verb with that meaning. Compare his translations of 3:8, 27:5, and Exod. 16:12 with his translations here, in 28:7 and in Exod. 24:7.

28 Midianite traders passed by. This was a different caravan. The text is letting you know that Joseph was sold several times. **They pulled Joseph up out of the pit**. They, his brothers, pulled him out of the pit and sold him to the Ishmaelites, who sold him

[D] Our texts of Onkelos have a very similar word that means "storax," which is a tree resin.

KIMHI **26 What do we gain by killing our brother?** Reuben had already prevented them from actively killing him. But they would be equally responsible for his death if they left him to die in the pit.

28 Midianite traders. These are the Ishmaelites of v. 25. The Midianites are descended from Keturah; if she was Hagar, then they were Ishmael's full brothers. But even if

NAHMANIDES (Deut. 34:12); similarly, compare 1 Kings 7:14 with 1 Kings 7:51. For that matter, 39:22 tells us of Joseph himself that "whatsoever they did there, he was the doer of it" (see OJPS). A deed can be ascribed to the one who commands it or to the one who actually does it. Ibn Ezra, who thinks that Midianites are Ishmaelites, does not understand the Gideon story correctly. He forgot that in the beginning of that story, "all Midian, Amalek, and the Kedemites joined forces" (Judg. 6:33). It was "the Kedemites" who were Ishmaelites; the sons who were sent eastward in 25:6 were *all* of "Abraham's sons by concubines." Or perhaps the Midianites were ruled by Ishmaelite kings at the time. Why would anyone call Midianites Ishmaelites? In any case, our story is to be understood as we have explained it. Admittedly, our Sages say Joseph was sold multiple times.

26 And covering up his blood. Rashi is following Onkelos here, but in this case the words are to be taken literally. Murderers bury the dead body to conceal it, and they cover up the blood with earth: "he struck down the Egyptian and hid him in the sand" (Exod. 2:12). Judah is saying that even casting Joseph into the pit amounts to murder. First Reuben warned them to cast Joseph into the pit rather than shed his blood directly; now Judah is saying that too would amount to murder—which is in fact correct. As the Lord tells David (via Nathan): "You have put Uriah the Hittite to the sword . . . and had him killed by the sword of the Ammonites" (2 Sam. 12:9). (For a more complicated argument on this point, see B. Kidd. 43a.) Even if directly causing death carries a greater punishment, both Reuben and Judah were speaking the truth.

28 When Midianite traders passed by, they pulled Joseph up out of the pit. "They," the brothers, pulled him out. **[A]**

[A] See Nahmanides' comment to 24:32.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS (Hizkuni). The fact that they sat down to eat demonstrates conclusively that they were sure they had not done anything wrong (Sforno). **To be taken to Egypt**. The Ishmaelites were not selling the goods; their only responsibility was to get them down to Egypt (Sforno).

26 What do we gain by killing our brother and covering up his blood? Since the dead are forgotten, killing him is no revenge. — David says something similar in Ps. 59:12. "Do not kill them lest my people be unmindful" (Hizkuni).

27 His brothers agreed. They reasoned: It was decreed in the covenant between the pieces [in ch. 15] that descendants of our great-grandfather Abraham would be enslaved; perhaps we can arrange for that decree to be fulfilled by this one alone (Hizkuni). If he becomes a slave he will not rule over anyone, least of all over us (Gersonides).

28 They pulled Joseph up out of the pit. This precise form of the verb is found also only in Jer. 38:13, "they pulled Jeremiah up by

RASHBAM **27 Let us not do away with him ourselves.** Even indirectly.

28 When Midianite traders passed by. While the brothers were eating a little way off from the pit so as not to "eat anything with its blood" (Lev. 19:26). They were waiting for the Ishmaelites they had

IBN EZRA letters, often interchange. **Balm.** We find this word in the Bible with three different vowels after the צ; see "Is there no balm in Gilead?" (Jer. 8:22) and "honey, oil, and balm" (Ezek. 27:17) for examples of the others. Saadia explains it as a concoction made out of 75 different ingredients, but others say it is a fruit. Still others think it is either a fruit or the resin from a tree, which was brought from Jericho to Egypt according to Joseph b. Gorion. R. Ishmael says it is resin, and that's good enough for us. **Ladanum.** Saadia says this is the same fruit called *b'lut* in Arabic. Maybe so.

26 What do we gain? What use is it to us? The expression more or less means, "What good is it?" See similarly "what is to be gained from my death?" (Ps. 30:10).

27 He is our brother, our own flesh. Not literally "our own," of course, but we come from the same flesh.

28 When Midianite traders passed by. That is, when the Ishmaelites of v. 25 passed by. It is common to find Midianites referred to as Ishmaelites. Notice that when

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NJPS out of the pit. They sold Joseph for twenty pieces of silver to the Ishmaelites, who brought Joseph to Egypt.

29When Reuben returned to the pit and saw that Joseph was not in the pit, he rent his clothes. 30Returning to his brothers, he said, "The boy is gone! Now, what am I to do?" 31Then they took Joseph's tunic, slaughtered a kid, and dipped the tunic in the blood. 32They had the ornamented tunic taken to their father, and they said, "We found this. Please examine it; is it

לְיִשְׁמְעֵאלִים בְּעֶשְׂרִים כֶּסֶף וַיָּבִיאוּ אֶת־
יוֹסֵף מִצְרָיְמָה׃
29 וַיָּשָׁב רְאוּבֵן אֶל־הַבּוֹר וְהִנֵּה אֵין־יוֹסֵף
בַּבּוֹר וַיִּקְרַע אֶת־בְּגָדָיו׃ 30 וַיָּשָׁב אֶל־אֶחָיו
וַיֹּאמֶר הַיֶּלֶד אֵינֶנּוּ וְאֲנִי אָנָה אֲנִי־
בָא׃ 31 וַיִּקְחוּ אֶת־כְּתֹנֶת יוֹסֵף וַיִּשְׁחֲטוּ
שְׂעִיר עִזִּים וַיִּטְבְּלוּ אֶת־הַכְּתֹנֶת בַּדָּם׃
32 וַיְשַׁלְּחוּ אֶת־כְּתֹנֶת הַפַּסִּים וַיָּבִיאוּ אֶל־
אֲבִיהֶם וַיֹּאמְרוּ זֹאת מָצָאנוּ הַכֶּר־נָא

OJPS the pit, and sold Joseph to the Ishmaelites for twenty shekels of silver. And they brought Joseph into Egypt.

29And Reuben returned unto the pit; and, behold, Joseph was not in the pit; and he rent his clothes. 30And he returned unto his brethren, and said: "The child is not; and as for me, whither shall I go?" 31And they took Joseph's coat, and killed a he-goat, and dipped the coat in the blood; 32and they sent the coat of many colors, and they brought it to their father; and said: "This have we found. Know now

RASHI to the Midianites, who sold him to the Egyptians.

29 When Reuben returned to the pit. Reuben had not been there when Joseph was sold. It was his turn to serve his father. Another reading: He did not eat with them because he was fasting to repent for disturbing his father's bed. **[E]**

30 Now, what am I to do? More literally, "whither shall I go?" (OJPS)—where can I flee from my father's sorrow?

31 A kid. Whose blood resembles that of a human being. **The tunic.** Notice the vowel under the כ. We are used to seeing this word only in construct form (as in the first occurrence in this verse), where the כ always has a *sheva*. But our form is the actual word "tunic" by itself, not connected to another word.

[E] See 35:22 and 49:4.

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ How could Reuben tell the brothers, "The boy is gone! Now, what am I to do?" (v. 30)? Wouldn't this reveal that he never meant to kill Joseph in the first place?

KIMHI Keturah wasn't Hagar, they were all sons of Abraham. **They pulled Joseph up out of the pit.** The brothers did. But Reuben was not with them. Either he had gone to his father, or he was tending his own flock elsewhere by himself.

30 The boy is gone! He did not realize that they had sold him, but thought he had been stolen out of the pit.

32 They had the ornamented tunic taken to their father. Literally, "they sent" it (OJPS)—sending a few of the brothers to take it to their father. But some understand the

NAHMANIDES **32 They had the ornamented tunic taken to their father.** Literally, "they sent [it] and they brought it" (OJPS), but with the meaning that "they had it brought." Alternatively, "they," the brothers, sent it, and "they," those who had been sent with it, brought it. As for specifying "the ornamented tunic," that was how Jacob was supposed to recognize it. **We found this. Please examine it.** Another possibility is that they sent it back to Hebron, to the house of one of them, and when they came home they themselves brought it to their father and said, "We found this." The point was to provide themselves with an alibi. Had they done nothing, Jacob would have accused them of

RASHBAM seen. But before the Ishmaelites got there, some other people, Midianites, passed by, saw Joseph in the pit, and pulled him out. It was these Midianites who sold him to the Ishmaelites. The brothers apparently knew nothing about this, despite what Joseph says to them later, "I am your brother Joseph, he whom you sold into Egypt" (45:4). Their actions certainly did contribute indirectly to his being sold; but, after an in-depth examination, this seems to me the correct understanding of the straightforward sense. To say that the Midianite traders "passed by" implies that they did so by chance. **They pulled Joseph up out of the pit.** Even if you think the next phrase refers to Joseph's brothers, you must still admit that it was the Midianites who "passed by" and "pulled Joseph up out of the pit." If it was the brothers who sold him to the Ishmaelites, they must have told the Midianites to do this.

30 Now, what am I to do? Rather, "where am I going?" Why did I go to the pit?

32 They had the ornamented tunic taken to their father. By some people who would not tell who had "sent" them (OJPS). **We found this.** The people the brothers sent said this.

IBN EZRA the men of Israel take earrings as booty from the Midianites, the text explains, "They had golden earrings, for they were Ishmaelites" (Judg. 8:24).

30 Now, what am I to do? More literally, "and I, where am I to go?" "I" occurs twice when once would have been plenty—but that is how language works.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS the ropes and got him out of the pit" (Masorah). **They sold Joseph for twenty pieces of silver.** They must have made him swear not to let Jacob know about this in any way, shape, or form; thinking it was better to swear this than to be killed, he agreed. If he did not, why didn't he simply send a message to Jacob saying, "Hey, I'm down here in Egypt!"? This also proves that it must have been his brothers who sold him. It was a great deal for them, since they were given 20 pieces of silver when in fact they would have paid to get rid of him (Bekhor Shor). His brothers knew nothing of the dealings between the Midianites and the Ishmaelites; when Reuben returned to the pit and did not find him, they were all convinced that a wild animal had eaten him, which means that they did not lie to their father. If they were not certain he was dead, why didn't they recognize him when they saw him in Egypt—especially when he seated them "from the oldest in the order of his seniority to the youngest in the order of his youth" (43:33)? Another reading: Joseph's face was so green from fear of the snakes that all they could get for him was 20 shekels—2 shekels each, just enough to buy a pair of sandals. See Amos 2:6, "For three transgressions of Israel, for four, I will not revoke it: Because they have sold for silver those whose cause was just, and the needy for a pair of sandals" (Hizkuni). They did not sell Joseph for the money, but just to get him out of their father's house (Abarbanel).

30 The boy is gone! Now, what am I to do? The boy is gone—you must have killed him! Now, what am I to do? The next thing I know, you will kill me too! (Abarbanel).

31 Then they took Joseph's tunic, slaughtered a kid, and dipped the tunic in the blood. Some say kid's blood resembles human blood, but it may simply have happened that a kid turned up (Bekhor Shor).

32 They had the ornamented tunic taken to their father. They did not want to bring it themselves because they were afraid their faces would give them away (Bekhor Shor). Literally, "they sent" it (OJPS). The word cannot mean "rend" here; a garment cut by a sword would not look as if it had been torn by a beast (Gersonides).

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NJPS your son's tunic or not?" [33]He recognized it, and said, "My son's tunic! A savage beast devoured him! Joseph was torn by a beast!" [34]Jacob rent his clothes, put sackcloth on his loins, and observed mourning for his son many days. [35]All his sons and daughters sought to comfort him; but he refused to be comforted, saying, "No, I will go down mourning to my son in Sheol." Thus his father bewailed him.

OJPS whether it is thy son's coat or not." [33]And he knew it, and said: "It is my son's coat; an evil beast hath devoured him; Joseph is without doubt torn in pieces." [34]And Jacob rent his garments, and put sackcloth upon his loins, and mourned for his son many days. [35]And all his sons and all his daughters rose up to comfort him; but he refused to be comforted; and he said: "Nay, but I will go down to the grave to my son mourning." And his father wept for him.

הַכְּתֹנֶת בִּנְךָ הִוא אִם־לֹא׃ 33 וַיַּכִּירָהּ
וַיֹּאמֶר כְּתֹנֶת בְּנִי חַיָּה רָעָה אֲכָלָתְהוּ
טָרֹף טֹרַף יוֹסֵף׃ 34 וַיִּקְרַע יַעֲקֹב שִׂמְלֹתָיו
וַיָּשֶׂם שַׂק בְּמָתְנָיו וַיִּתְאַבֵּל עַל־בְּנוֹ יָמִים
רַבִּים׃ 35 וַיָּקֻמוּ כָל־בָּנָיו וְכָל־בְּנֹתָיו
לְנַחֲמוֹ וַיְמָאֵן לְהִתְנַחֵם וַיֹּאמֶר כִּי־אֵרֵד
אֶל־בְּנִי אָבֵל שְׁאֹלָה וַיִּבְךְּ אֹתוֹ אָבִיו׃

RASHI **33 My son's tunic!** He is answering their question: "[This is] my son's tunic." **A savage beast devoured him!** The Holy Spirit sparked within him for a moment. His words portended that Joseph would end up at the mercy of Potiphar's wife. And why did the Holy Spirit not reveal to Jacob what had really happened? Because the brothers had anathematized and cursed anyone who would reveal it, and they had gotten the Holy One to cooperate. Isaac, who did know that Joseph was alive, thought, "How can I tell him if the Holy One is not willing to tell him?"

34 Many days. Twenty-two years, to be precise—from the time Joseph left home until Jacob went down to Egypt. In v. 2, Joseph is 17, and "Joseph was thirty years old when he entered the service of Pharaoh king of Egypt" (41:46). There were still 7 years of plenty and 2 more of famine to come before Jacob came down to Egypt, making 22 in all, corresponding to the 22 years when Jacob neglected to honor his father and mother. For he spent 20 years in Laban's house and another 2 years on the journey home: a year and a half in Succoth and six months in Bethel. As he told Laban in 31:41 (translating the Hebrew literally), "These 20 years I have been in your house are *on me*"—they are on my account, and eventually I will be punished for them.

35 All his sons and daughters. R Judah says: Twin sisters were born with each of the 12 brothers (and that is who the brothers married). R. Nehemiah says: They married Canaanites. So who were Jacob's "daughters"? His daughters-in-law. There is nothing to stop a man from calling his son-in-law "son" or his daughter-in-law "daughter." **But he refused to be comforted.** One can never be comforted for the death of someone who is not really dead. The Holy One decreed that our memories of the dead gradually fade, but this does not apply if the person is actually alive. **I will go down mourning to my son in Sheol.** There are many examples of the prepositions *el* and *al* being interchanged (e.g., 1 Sam. 4:21 and 2 Sam. 21:1), and this is one of them: "I will go down mourning *over* my son." Nor does

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why did Jacob answer the question his sons posed in v. 32 by saying, "My son's tunic!" (v. 33). That is not even a complete sentence! ✦ What was the point of Jacob's saying "A savage beast devoured him!" and then repeating "Joseph was torn by a beast!"? ✦ Why would "all his sons and daughters" seek "to comfort him" (v. 35)? Wouldn't they too have been among the mourners? ✦ Why did they "all" come, young and old alike, instead of just the oldest of the sons? (The "daughters" presumably are their wives, the daughters-in-law, who would also not be expected in this case.) ✦ Why was Jacob's grief for Joseph so powerful that he said, "No, I will go down mourning to my son in Sheol"? ✦ Why would a righteous man like Jacob not accept the death of his son as a decree from heaven? ✦ Why is Jacob called "his [Joseph's] father" at this point? ✦ It is obvious that he "bewailed him"—why must we be told so? ✦ Why does the Torah not tell us the punishment Jacob's sons received for committing this cruel crime?

IBN EZRA **33 Was torn.** The verb is Pual; the vowel is *o* here instead of *u* because the ר cannot take the *dagesh* that is supposed to go in the middle consonant of a Pual form. Compare "scoured" and "rinsed" of Lev. 6:21.

35 All his sons and daughters. The "daughters" are his own daughter Dinah and his granddaughter Serah. **[C] Sheol.** That is, "the below"—the grave. The translator of the errant ones **[D]** erred himself here, for he translated "Sheol" as "hell." But it refers to the "earth" in which a person is buried, the opposite of heaven: "If I ascend to heaven, You are there; if I descend to Sheol, You are there too" (Ps. 139:8) and many other verses demonstrate this. **Thus his father bewailed him.** Our tradition takes this to mean that Isaac wept for Jacob. And it is certainly true that Isaac did not die until Joseph was 29 years old. Some say that

[C] See 46:17. Ibn Ezra does not specify their names. **[D]** Jerome, in his Christian Latin translation.

KIMHI verb differently, to mean "they sworded it." Our root is used this way in "they shall perish by the *sword*" (Job 36:12). That is, they sliced it to look as if it had been torn by animals.

34 Jacob rent his clothes. Not only did he love him more than the others—he had sent him to them and felt responsible for his death.

35 Thus his father bewailed him. Even though Joseph had tended the flocks with his brothers, he had spent most of his time serving his father. Now, whenever Jacob needed Joseph's help, he could not help but remember him, and he would burst into tears.

NAHMANIDES killing him. He knew they were jealous of him. But some, taking their cue from the alternative meaning of the root שלח in Job 36:12, say that they did not "send" the tunic, but "rended" it and brought it to their father.

35 All his sons and daughters. His "daughters" were his daughter and his granddaughter. But perhaps his daughters-in-law are included in the expression. As the Sages say, it is perfectly fine for a man to call his daughters-in-law his daughters. Naomi certainly did this: "Turn back, my daughters" (Ruth 1:12); "Oh no, my daughters!" (Ruth 1:13); "Yes, daughter, go" (Ruth 2:2). It is an affectionate way of speaking; Boaz too says to Ruth, "Listen to me, daughter" (Ruth 2:8).

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **33 A savage beast devoured him!** If he had been attacked by robbers, they would not have left the tunic (Hizkuni). **Joseph was torn by a beast!** Rather, Jacob believed that "a savage beast [had] devoured him," but wondered, "Can Joseph really have been torn by a beast" if not even a bone was left? (Abarbanel).

35 All his sons and daughters sought to comfort him. They took his excessive mourning as a bad sign; he was mourning for Joseph as if he had no other children. A father should never do this (Abarbanel). **No, I will go down mourning to my son in Sheol.** Rather, "on account of" my son—I sent him on this errand and I am responsible for his death (Hizkuni). What Jacob meant was, "A father

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NJPS 36The Midianites, meanwhile, sold him in Egypt to Potiphar, a courtier of Pharaoh and his chief steward.

OJPS 36And the Midianites sold him into Egypt unto Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh's, the captain of the guard.

38 About that time Judah left his brothers and camped near a certain Adullamite

36 וְהַמְּדָנִים מָכְרוּ אֹתוֹ אֶל־מִצְרַיִם
לְפוֹטִיפַר סְרִיס פַּרְעֹה שַׂר הַטַּבָּחִים׃ פ

רביעי
לח וַיְהִי֙ בָּעֵ֣ת הַהִ֔וא וַיֵּ֥רֶד יְהוּדָ֖ה
מֵאֵ֣ת אֶחָ֑יו וַיֵּ֗ט עַד־אִ֛ישׁ עֲדֻלָּמִ֥י וּשְׁמ֖וֹ

RASHI the Hebrew say "my son in Sheol," but "I will go down mourning *to* Sheol," that is, in the straightforward sense of the text, "to the grave" (OJPS). "I will still be in mourning when I am buried, and will never be comforted all my days." But a midrash takes Jacob to be announcing that he is doomed to Gehenna: "I was given a sign by the Almighty that if none of my sons died during my lifetime I could be assured of never seeing Gehenna." **Thus his father bewailed him.** That is, Jacob's father, Isaac, "wept for him" (OJPS). He wept over Jacob's distress. But he himself did not mourn for Joseph, because he knew he was alive.

36 His chief steward. More literally, "the chief of the butchers" who slaughtered animals for the king.

38:1 About that time Judah left his brothers. More precisely, he "went down from" his brothers (OJPS). What is this episode doing here? Why does it interrupt the story of Joseph at this point? To teach us that Judah's brothers deposed him from his high rank when they saw their father's distress. They told him, "You were the one who said to sell him. If you had told us to send him home, we would have listened to you." **And camped.** More precisely, "and spread out" away from his brothers. **Near a certain Adullamite.** More precisely, he turned "to" him (OJPS), going into partnership with him.

KIMHI **38:1 About that time Judah left his brothers.** After Joseph was sold, Judah "went down" from his brothers; evidently from Dothan to Adullam was a descent. **And camped near a certain Adullamite.** Once he reached Adullam, he pitched his tent (with his flock) and became friendly with this particular man.

NAHMANIDES **36 His chief steward.** Rashi's comment is supported by the use of the word to mean a cook in 1 Sam. 8:13 and 1 Sam. 9:24. But given that the prison was in his house, Onkelos's translation is more likely to be correct. We do find this root used not just for killing animals for food but for killing human beings: "Prepare a *slaughtering block* for his sons" (Isa. 14:21); "You slew them on Your day of wrath, You *slaughtered* without pity" (Lam. 2:21). Further support comes from Dan. 2:14, which uses the Aramaic version of this expression to call Arioch "*the captain of the royal guard* who had set out to put the wise men of Babylon to death."

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ "Judah left his brothers" (v. 1)—but where did he go?

38 And it came to pass at that time, that Judah went down from his brethren, and turned in to a certain Adullamite,

RASHBAM **36 The Midianites, meanwhile, sold him in Egypt to Potiphar.** More precisely, "the Medanites" (see the Hebrew); Medan, Midian, and Ishmael were all brothers. **[E]** But the straightforward sense here must be that these "Medanites" are the Ishmaelites of v. 28. Our verse calls them Medanites and 39:1 calls them Ishmaelites, but of course they are one and the same.

[E] See 16:15 and 25:2.

IBN EZRA prophecy departed from both Isaac and Jacob on account of their grief; this idea is based on Elisha's saying, "Get me a musician," after which "the hand of the LORD came upon him [once more]" (2 Kings 3:15). **[E]**

36 His chief steward. You will find the same Hebrew expression used for the chief butcher and the chief executioner. Onkelos, who chooses the latter, is correct here.

38:1 About that time. Not "about the time" Joseph was sold, but earlier. You can see that the expression does not indicate simultaneity by comparing "From there they marched to Gudgod, and from Gudgod to Jotbath, a region of running brooks. At that time [using our same Hebrew expression] the LORD set apart the tribe of Levi to carry the Ark of the LORD's Covenant" (Deut. 10:7–8). But of course they marched to Gudgod in the 40th year and the Levites were set apart in the 2nd year. For its own reasons, the text invokes "that [earlier] time" when something important for the story had happened (see my comment there). Here, the question is why this chapter follows the Midianites' sale of Joseph, which ought to have been followed immediately by "Joseph was taken down to Egypt" (39:1). The purpose was to let us see the difference between Joseph's behavior with his master's wife and the behavior of his brother Judah with Tamar. I am forced to offer this explanation because only 22 years separate the sale of Joseph and his brothers' arrival in Egypt. Meanwhile, in our chapter alone, enough time passes for Judah to have children and then grandchildren; and (per 46:12) by the time they went down to Egypt Judah's grandson Perez already had two children of his own. As for the tradition that one can father children as early as age eight, see my comment to "you have Aaron and Hur with you" (Exod. 24:14). **Judah left his brothers.** Literally, he "went down" from them

[E] Kimhi's comment to that verse says prophecy had left him while he mourned over the death of his master Elijah.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS goes down to his son's grave, weeps his fill, and at last is comforted. But I, who do not know where my son is buried, cannot go to his grave. How can I ever find comfort?" But some think Jacob felt guilty for sending Joseph to his death, and feared that if he stopped grieving the Holy One would find some other way to punish him. And there is one further aspect: Jacob knew that the Patriarchs resembled the world on high in microcosm. His 12 sons corresponded to the 12 signs of the zodiac. If one of his sons was dead, the whole enterprise was destroyed (Abarbanel).

36 The Midianites, meanwhile, sold him in Egypt to Potiphar, a courtier of Pharaoh and his chief steward. Since the brothers sold Joseph into slavery, they in turn would be exiled to Egypt and enslaved there. It is a case of "measure for measure" (Hizkuni).

38:1 About that time Judah left his brothers. He could not bear to witness his father's pain (Bekhor Shor). Since in the old days boys began to father children at age seven, all this could certainly have happened before they went down to Egypt (Hizkuni). This could obviously not all have happened after the sale of Joseph; it was going on "about that [same] time." You need not be concerned about Judah leaving his brothers before the sale but being on the scene for it. He had flocks of his own—perhaps from the spoils of Shechem—and would go back and forth between his flocks and his father's (Gersonides). The Torah found it right to interrupt the story of Joseph with this chapter for several reasons: among them, that Judah would be the source of the kings of Judah, and Joseph would be the source of the kings of the northern kingdom of Israel through his sons Ephraim and Manasseh (Abarbanel). This all happened subsequent to the

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NJPS whose name was Hirah. [2]There Judah saw the daughter of a certain Canaanite whose name was Shua, and he married her and cohabited with her. [3]She conceived and bore a son, and he named him Er. [4]She conceived again and bore a son, and named

חִירָה׃ 2 וַיַּרְא־שָׁם יְהוּדָה בַּת־אִישׁ כְּנַעֲנִי
וּשְׁמוֹ שׁוּעַ וַיִּקָּחֶהָ וַיָּבֹא אֵלֶיהָ׃ 3 וַתַּהַר
וַתֵּלֶד בֵּן וַיִּקְרָא אֶת־שְׁמוֹ עֵר׃ 4 וַתַּהַר
עוֹד וַתֵּלֶד בֵּן וַתִּקְרָא אֶת־שְׁמוֹ אוֹנָן׃

OJPS whose name was Hirah. [2]And Judah saw there a daughter of a certain Canaanite whose name was Shua; and he took her, and went in unto her. [3]And she conceived, and bore a son; and he called his name Er. [4]And she conceived again, and bore a son; and she called his name

RASHI **2 A certain Canaanite.** Here the word really means "a merchant."

KIMHI **2 There Judah saw the daughter of a certain Canaanite.** Evidently he "saw" that she was attractive and decent.

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ "There Judah saw the daughter of a certain Canaanite" (v. 2)—again, where? ✦ Why are we not told the name of Judah's wife, when we are told her father's name and even (later) the names of Judah's daughter-in-law and even of a friend of Judah's?

RASHBAM **38:2 A Canaanite.** Rather, as Onkelos says, a "merchant": "Tyre, whose *traders* the world honored" (Isa. 23:8); "a *trader* who uses false balances" (Hosea 12:8). They were forbidden to marry actual Canaanite women.

IBN EZRA (OJPS). According to the Sages, this means he "went down" in status, but that is midrash. To "go down" means to move from north to south. Those who have studied geography will certainly agree that this is true.

2 A certain Canaanite. Some consider him a merchant, as in "that day there shall be no more *traders* in the House of the LORD of Hosts" (Zech. 14:21). But there is no reason it could not simply mean what it says: a Canaanite.

NAHMANIDES **38:2 There Judah saw the daughter of a certain Canaanite.** Onkelos calls him "a merchant," that is, someone from elsewhere who had come to Canaan for business reasons. His point is that Jacob's sons would be careful to avoid marrying Canaanite girls, as their ancestors Isaac and Abraham had instructed. **[B]** B. Pes. 50a also calls him a merchant. So Jacob's sons must have married Egyptians, Ammonites, Moabites, or women who could be identified as descended from the sons of Ishmael and of Keturah. That explains why the text uniquely identifies Simeon's son Saul as "the son of a Canaanite woman" (46:10)—he was the only one. Even in his case, the Sages took him to be the son of Dinah by a Canaanite man. But the matter was disputed. "R. Judah says: Female twins were born with each of Jacob's sons, and they married them. R. Nehemiah says: Their wives were Canaanite." But it may be that R. Nehemiah did not really know the women's origins, meaning merely that they had married women whom they met in Canaan, but who could have been sojourners from the neighboring nations or from any other. He was just disputing R. Judah's conclusion that they married their sisters. (For a sister of the same mother is forbidden to all descendants of Noah.) Following R. Judah's opinion, the six sons of Leah would have had to marry the twins of the other six boys and vice versa. Or else R. Nehemiah is denying that these twins existed at all, saying that Jacob's only daughter was Dinah (which is what the text seems to say). It is simply not correct to say that they all married Canaanites. That would mean that some of those who later inherited the land were descendants of Canaan, cursed to be "the lowest of slaves" (9:25)—right alongside the descendants of Abraham, who were commanded to proscribe the descendants of Canaan so that he would have not even a remnant surviving. In any case, this particular man was a merchant. The text would not bother to tell us that the man was an ethnic Canaanite, which all the inhabitants of that land were in one way or another, whether Perizzites or Jebusites or what have you. Adullam is certainly located in Canaan. The real question is why the text does not tell us this woman's name as it does with Tamar, with Esau's wives, and with many others. Instead, it tells us that her father was a merchant, ergo not originally a Canaanite at all. That is why it says that he "saw the daughter of a certain Canaanite"; he spotted a girl whose father made her marriageable. The fact that 1 Chron. 2:3 calls her a "Canaanite woman" simply means that she was this man's daughter and has no bearing on the meaning of the expression. He may have been well known as a merchant, which is undoubtedly what brought him to live in the place. If Ibn Ezra's comment to 46:10 is correct, however, then Shelah too was "the son of a Canaanite woman" (46:10)—but this, for whatever reason, went without saying. So "Judah saw" would simply mean that he saw her and desired her, as Samson "*noticed* a girl among the Philistine women" (Judg. 14:1). Rashi's comment to 50:13 would seem to support Ibn Ezra, but our version of Genesis Rabbah differs from the one on which Rashi's comment is based. Tamar too was certainly the daughter of someone who was a sojourner in the land and not an actual Canaanite. God forbid that our lord King David, our righteous Messiah—may he speedily be revealed to us—is a descendant of Canaan, the accursed slave. Our Sages say that Tamar was a daughter of Shem, whom they identify as Melchizedek, the "priest of God Most High" (14:18).

3 He named him Er. Judah named him Er, which is derived from "*rouse* Your might" (Ps. 80:3).

4 She conceived again and bore a son, and named him Onan. This time Judah's wife named the boy, though the text does not explain why she gave him this name. But perhaps it was because she had a difficult labor with him. It is the custom for women to name their sons in such cases, like the mother of Jabez, who gave him that name "Because I bore him in *pain*" (1 Chron. 4:9). Atarah, "the mother of Onam" (1 Chron. 2:26), must have done the same. That name is a variant of ours, which derives from the root used in "The people took to *complaining*" (Num. 11:1) and "Of what shall a living man *complain*?" (Lam. 3:39)—not to mention its likeness to Ben-oni, the name Rachel originally gave Benjamin in 35:18. In this case, Judah did not bother to change the boy's name as his father, Jacob, had Benjamin's. As for the statement in Genesis Rabbah that Er was "emptied out" (*hu'ar*) of the world, Judah of course did not name him for this reason. They are saying that names can shape a person's future.

[B] See 28:1 and 24:3, respectively.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS sale of Joseph; Judah's punishment for not returning Joseph to his father was to lose two of his own sons (Sforno). **A certain Adullamite whose name was Hirah.** Leaving the society of his brothers for this man's companionship was indeed a "going down," as the Hebrew literally says of it (Abarbanel).

2 The daughter of a certain Canaanite. He was literally a Canaanite, which is why this woman's sons were evil (Abarbanel).

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NJPS him Onan. [5]Once again she bore a son, and named him Shelah; he was at Chezib when she bore him.

[6]Judah got a wife for Er his first-born; her name was Tamar. [7]But Er, Judah's first-born, was displeasing to the LORD, and the LORD took his life. [8]Then Judah said to Onan, "Join with your brother's wife and do your duty by her as a brother-in-law,

5 וַתֹּסֶף עוֹד וַתֵּלֶד בֵּן וַתִּקְרָא אֶת־שְׁמוֹ
שֵׁלָה וְהָיָה בְכְזִיב בְּלִדְתָּהּ אֹתוֹ׃
6 וַיִּקַּח יְהוּדָה אִשָּׁה לְעֵר בְּכוֹרוֹ וּשְׁמָהּ
תָּמָר׃ 7 וַיְהִי עֵר בְּכוֹר יְהוּדָה רַע בְּעֵינֵי
יְהוָה וַיְמִתֵהוּ יְהוָה׃ 8 וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוּדָה
לְאוֹנָן בֹּא אֶל־אֵשֶׁת אָחִיךָ וְיַבֵּם אֹתָהּ

OJPS Onan. [5]And she yet again bore a son, and called his name Shelah; and he was at Chezib, when she bore him.

[6]And Judah took a wife for Er his first-born, and her name was Tamar. [7]And Er, Judah's first-born, was wicked in the sight of the LORD; and the LORD slew him. [8]And Judah said unto Onan: "Go in unto thy brother's wife, and perform the duty of a husband's brother unto her, and raise up

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why are we told that Shelah was born at Chezib (v. 5) but not where his older brothers were born? ✦ What did Er do that made him "displeasing to the LORD" (v. 7)? We are told what Onan did.

RASHI **5 He was at Chezib.** This is certainly a place name, but I suspect it was called that because this was where she ceased to bear children. See the usage of this root in "Like a spring whose waters do not *fail*" (Isa. 58:11); "You have been to me like a spring that *fails*" (Jer. 15:18). If not, what is the point of telling us this? In fact, I have seen in Genesis Rabbah that the name Shelah itself indicates this as well. **[F]**

7 Displeasing to the LORD. From the statement that the Lord took Onan's life "also" (v. 10), we understand that Er did the same displeasing thing that Onan did, letting his seed go to waste. And why would Er want to keep his wife from getting pregnant? So as not to ruin her looks.

8 Provide offspring for your brother. The son would be named after the dead man.

[F] See Nahmanides' comment.

RASHBAM **5 He was at Chezib when she bore him.** Judah was at Chezib, where this son was born to him.

IBN EZRA **5 At Chezib.** A place name.

8 Do your duty by her as a brother-in-law. Literally, "brother-in-law" her, that is, since you are her *levir*, her brother-in-law, demonstrate your willingness to participate in levirate marriage. I will discuss this at greater length in my comments to Deut. 25:5, if the good Lord lengthens my days long enough for me to do so.

KIMHI **5 He was at Chezib when she bore him.** Judah named the first boy (v. 3) and his wife the second (v. 4); it must have been the custom to alternate. So it should have been Judah's turn to name this one—but "he was at Chezib when she bore him" and so she named him.

7 But Er, Judah's first-born, was displeasing to the LORD. No one knew why except for the Lord; presumably it was something private between Er and Tamar.

8 Do your duty by her as a brother-in-law. Apparently this was the rule among the ancients even before the Torah was given.

NAHMANIDES **5 Once again she bore a son, and named him Shelah; he was at Chezib when she bore him.** As for Rashi's comment, I do not understand why the *place* would be named after this. The actual birth, of course, was not something that would be commemorated in this way. Three sons is a reasonable number, and she would have no way of knowing, when Shelah was born, whether or not she was going to have any more children. Only her death would make that obvious. Some say their custom was to let the father name the first-born and then to alternate between the mother and the father; it was Judah's turn to name this boy, but he was at Chezib and could not do it. That explanation, however, makes no sense to me. (Ibn Ezra has yet another.) In my opinion, it is the name Shelah that represents failure and disappointment, as in "Did I ask my lord for a son? Didn't I say: 'Don't *mislead* me'?" (2 Kings 4:28). The Hebrew root there is connected with Shelah, while the Targum of that verse uses the Aramaic equivalent of Chezib. The verse is telling us that she named him Shelah *because* he was born at Chezib, two words with essentially the same meaning. So a better translation would be: "It was at Chezib that she bore him." Genesis Rabbah is explaining the meaning of the place name.

7 Er, Judah's first-born, was displeasing to the LORD. The text does not tell us what he did wrong as it does for Onan. The purpose of the statement is to let us know that he did not die as a punishment of Judah for selling Joseph. Judah's saving Joseph's life canceled out his role in the sale. Note, however, that this is the single case where one of the Patriarchs lost a child who was "displeasing to the Lord." For the offspring of the righteous is blessed. That is why Jacob "mourned for his son many days" and "refused to be comforted" (37:34–35). On top of his love for Joseph, he took it as if he himself had received a terrible punishment.

8 Do your duty by her as a brother-in-law, and provide offspring for your brother. What Rashi says is not true. Saying that "the first son that she bears shall be accounted to the dead brother, that his name may not be blotted out in Israel" (Deut. 25:6) does not mean that the man must name the boy after his dead brother. Boaz married Ruth, the widow of Mahlon, "to perpetuate the name of the deceased" (Ruth 4:10), but "they named him Obed" (Ruth 4:17)—not Mahlon.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **5 Once again she bore a son, and named him Shelah.** Letting the father and mother alternate naming the children was a custom among them, as it still is among us today. What his mother intended by the name was something related to *shalvah*, "tranquility" (Abarbanel). **He was at Chezib when she bore him.** But the Holy Spirit had other ideas; it was this child through whom Judah would "deceive" (*chazab*) Tamar (Abarbanel).

7 But Er, Judah's first-born, was displeasing to the LORD. A clever bit of Hebrew: ער became רע. The Sages say he did not want to destroy Tamar's beauty, but he may simply not have wanted the trouble of raising children. Some people are interested only in their own pleasure (Bekhor Shor). He had anal intercourse with her, as did his brother; so Judah committed no sin with her, as she was a virgin. But since both boys were under 10 years old, it is hard to understand why they were punished. The age of responsibility for sin is age 20 (Hizkuni).

8 Do your duty by her as a brother-in-law. The verb is actually a privative Piel: "remove from her the status of waiting for her brother-in-law to marry her" (Hizkuni).

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NJPS and provide offspring for your brother." [9]But Onan, knowing that the seed would not count as his, let it go to waste whenever he joined with his brother's wife, so as not to provide offspring for his brother. [10]What he did was displeasing to the LORD, and He took his life also. [11]Then Judah said to his daughter-in-law Tamar, "Stay as a widow in your father's house until my son Shelah grows up"—for he thought, "He too might die like his brothers." So Tamar went to live in her father's house.

OJPS seed to thy brother." [9]And Onan knew that the seed would not be his; and it came to pass when he went in unto his brother's wife, that he spilled it on the ground, lest he should give seed to his brother. [10]And the thing which he did was evil in the sight of the LORD; and He slew him also. [11]Then said Judah to Tamar his daughter-in-law: "Remain a widow in thy father's house, till Shelah my son be grown up"; for he said: "Lest he also die, like his brethren." And Tamar went and dwelt in her father's house.

וְהָקֵם זֶרַע לְאָחִיךָ׃ [9]וַיֵּדַע אוֹנָן כִּי לֹא לוֹ יִהְיֶה הַזֶּרַע וְהָיָה אִם־בָּא אֶל־אֵשֶׁת אָחִיו וְשִׁחֵת אַרְצָה לְבִלְתִּי נְתָן־זֶרַע לְאָחִיו׃ [10]וַיֵּרַע בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה וַיָּמֶת גַּם־אֹתּוֹ׃ [11]וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוּדָה לְתָמָר כַּלָּתוֹ שְׁבִי אַלְמָנָה בֵּית־אָבִיךְ עַד־יִגְדַּל שֵׁלָה בְנִי כִּי אָמַר פֶּן־יָמוּת גַּם־הוּא כְּאֶחָיו וַתֵּלֶךְ תָּמָר וַתֵּשֶׁב בֵּית אָבִיהָ׃

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why did Onan let his seed go to waste just because "the seed would not count as his" (v. 9)? Many men name their sons after their brothers. ✦ Why did Judah tell Tamar, "Stay as a widow in your father's house" (v. 11) rather than keeping her in his own house? ✦ Why would waiting until Shelah grew up prevent him from dying like his brothers? They were already grown and died nonetheless. Judah should simply have turned her loose and sent her on her way.

RASHI **9 Let it go to waste.** He would thresh inside and scatter the seed outside.

11 For he thought, "He too might die like his brothers." He was putting her off with a straw, as the saying goes—a lame excuse. He had no intention of marrying her to Shelah. He took her for a woman whose husbands were guaranteed to die.

NAHMANIDES **9 Knowing that the seed would not count as his, let it go to waste whenever he joined with his brother's wife.** What would be so bad about naming the child Er as to make him do this? Most people would actually look forward to naming this child after their brother. Notice that the text does not tell us Onan "said" this—as is usual when giving the reason for someone's action—but that he *knew* it (OJPS). He had certain knowledge that the seed would not be his. This is a great secret, one of the mysteries of the Torah with regard to reproduction. It is plain enough for anyone to whom the Lord has given "a mind to understand, eyes to see, and ears to hear" (Deut. 29:3). The sages of old, in pre-Torah times, knew quite well that there is tremendous benefit in performing this service for one's brother. The brother ranks first, but there is still benefit if it is done by another family member, which is why they already had the custom of marrying the widow to the brother, the father, or some other relative. We do not know whether the custom predates Judah, though. Genesis Rabbah says he was the one who first introduced it. Having learned the secret from his ancestors, he was eager to have this commandment observed. When the Torah came and prohibited incest, the Holy One wanted to relax the prohibition enough for brothers (only) to be able to perform levirate marriage, since (as I said) this particular relationship provides the most benefit. A brother who refuses to do this service for his late brother is considered tremendously cruel, which is why he goes by the name of "the family of the unsandaled one" (Deut. 25:10). He has, as it were, cast his brother away from them. The ancient sages of Israel, knowing how important this was, established this custom under the name of "redemption" for all family members who were not directly prohibited from such a relationship. That is what is going on with Boaz and Naomi and the women neighbors in Ruth 4. One who is enlightened will understand.

11 Stay as a widow in your father's house. That is, dress in mourning attire and do not anoint yourself—"like a maiden girt with sackcloth for the husband of her youth" (Joel 1:8). **Until my son Shelah grows up.** And does his duty by you as a brother-in-law. All this is how it is customarily done. If the woman wants to marry someone from outside the family, she still must wear mourning clothes for at least the minimum time required by custom, after which she puts on bright clothing (as Tamar does in v. 14) and remarries. **For he thought.** Despite Rashi's comment, I do not know why Judah, the leader of that generation, would be ashamed to tell this woman to her face: "Leave my household in peace." Why would he mislead her? According to B. Ket. 43b, the two husbands who had already died on her should be enough to create a presumption—so she was actually *forbidden* to Shelah. And the fact that Judah presumed to have her taken out and burnt (v. 24) makes it seem that he did want her to remarry inside the family. It would be strange if Judah did not realize that his sons had been "displeasing to the LORD" (v. 7)—but "if your sons sinned against Him, He dispatched them

RASHBAM **9 Knowing that the seed would not count as his.** Which they were very insistent on. **So as not to provide offspring.** Note that when a word ends with an *o* in an accented syllable and the next word has its accent on the first syllable, the words are connected so that the *o* loses its accent, meaning that it is spelled not with a *vav* but with a *qamatz qatan*, e.g. "abounding in kindness" of Ps. 145:8. Contrast the *o* in the Hebrew of "these three ways" (Exod. 21:11) with that of "three cities" (Num. 35:14).

11 Stay as a widow in your father's house. He is telling her not merely to stay there but to stay a widow.

IBN EZRA **9 That the seed would not count as his.** It would not be called by his name: "The first son that she bears shall be accounted to the dead brother, that his name may not be blotted out in Israel" (Deut. 25:6). **Let it go to waste.** Literally, "he destroyed it to the ground"—he destroyed the seed by ejaculating it outside her, onto the ground. I have to laugh at Dunash ibn Tamim, the Easterner, who explained the phrase as a euphemistic reference to anal intercourse—intercourse with the part of her that sits "on the ground." This is simply insane. God forbid that the holy seed should be defiled in this way. **To provide.** Unusually using a regular form instead of the form peculiar to this ordinarily irregular verb.

11 Stay as a widow in your father's house. Note that "in" is not in the Hebrew but is understood; see similarly "in the House of the LORD" (2 Kings 12:11 and elsewhere). It is common to omit the preposition *b* when it would be attached to *bayit* ("house"), which already begins with a *b*.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **9 Knowing.** Not that he knew it for a fact, but he was convinced (Hizkuni). **That the seed would not count as his.** Using "seed" in the most literal sense. The crops from his own fields would pass out of his control, and he would leave no one to plow his fields or till them (Hizkuni). Not entirely as his, since his brother's marriage to Tamar was responsible for part of it (Sforno).

11 Stay as a widow in your father's house until my son Shelah grows up. And marries another woman and has sons by her. Once he has sons of his own and can be sure he will not die childless, he will do a brother-in-law's duty by you (Hizkuni). If you stay in *my* house, Shelah may sleep with you while still young and die like his brothers. So stay away from him until he grows up (Abarbanel).

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NJPS 12A long time afterward, Shua's daughter, the wife of Judah, died. When his period of mourning was over, Judah went up to Timnah to his sheepshearers, together with his friend Hirah the Adullamite. 13And Tamar was told, "Your father-in-law is coming up to Timnah for the sheepshearing." 14So she took off her widow's garb, covered her face with a veil, and, wrapping herself up, sat down at the entrance to Enaim, which is on the road to Timnah; for she saw that Shelah was grown up, yet she had not been given

OJPS 12And in process of time Shua's daughter, the wife of Judah, died; and Judah was comforted, and went up unto his sheep-shearers to Timnah, he and his friend Hirah the Adullamite. 13And it was told Tamar, saying: "Behold, thy father-in-law goeth up to Timnah to shear his sheep." 14And she put off from her the garments of her widowhood, and covered herself with her veil, and wrapped herself, and sat in the entrance of Enaim, which is by the way to Timnah; for she saw that Shelah was grown up, and she was

12 וַיִּרְבּוּ הַיָּמִים וַתָּמָת בַּת־שׁוּעַ אֵשֶׁת־
יְהוּדָה וַיִּנָּחֶם יְהוּדָה וַיַּעַל עַל־גֹּזְזֵי צֹאנוֹ
הוּא וְחִירָה רֵעֵהוּ הָעֲדֻלָּמִי תִּמְנָתָה׃
13 וַיֻּגַּד לְתָמָר לֵאמֹר הִנֵּה חָמִיךְ עֹלֶה
תִמְנָתָה לָגֹז צֹאנוֹ׃ 14 וַתָּסַר בִּגְדֵי
אַלְמְנוּתָהּ מֵעָלֶיהָ וַתְּכַס בַּצָּעִיף וַתִּתְעַלָּף
וַתֵּשֶׁב בְּפֶתַח עֵינַיִם אֲשֶׁר עַל־דֶּרֶךְ
תִּמְנָתָה כִּי רָאֲתָה כִּי־גָדַל שֵׁלָה וְהִוא

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Once Tamar "saw that Shelah was grown up, yet she had not been given to him as wife" (v. 14), why didn't she simply marry someone else rather than sleep with her father-in-law? ✦ Who forced Judah to give her three sons in a row anyway?

RASHI **12 Judah went up to Timnah to his sheepshearers**. To oversee them. **[G]**

13 Your father-in-law is coming up to Timnah. But in Judges we read, "Once Samson went *down* to Timnah" (Judg. 14:1). Timnah was on a mountain slope; you could go down to it from one direction and up to it from the other.

14 Covered her face with a veil. "Her face" is not in the Hebrew. See OJPS, and see my next comment. **Wrapping herself up**. Covering her face so that he would not recognize her. **Sat down at the entrance to Enaim, which is on the road to Timnah**. Enaim is not a place name but part of a phrase meaning "a crossroad." She sat down at a crossroad on the way to Timnah. Our Sages say that this was an entrance of "eyes" (which Enaim literally means), the entrance to the tent of our Patriarch Abraham, where all eyes waited expectantly to catch a glimpse of him. **For she saw that Shelah was grown up, yet she had not been given to him as wife**. That is why she offered herself to Judah—she desired to have sons by him.

[G] "To Timnah" comes at the end of the Hebrew verse; NJPS moves it earlier in accordance with Rashi's comment.

RASHBAM **14 Covered her face with a veil**. Rather, "she covered [her head] with a veil." This was not the kind of veil worn by a widow. **Wrapping herself up**. This is the verb explaining that she covered her face—to prevent Judah from recognizing her. **At the entrance to Enaim**. Rather, "at an 'eye' entrance," a gate where several roads went off in different directions. It would be easy to see everyone who passed through such a gate. It is a mistake to take Enaim as a name. The Hebrew of v. 21 says quite clearly *ba-enaim* ("at 'the eyes'"), not *be-enaim* ("at Enaim"). You can examine "at Bethel," "at Jericho," "at Jerusalem," and so on and not find any of them spelled with the vowel used here.

IBN EZRA **12 When his period of mourning was over**. OJPS translates literally; NJPS has the sense.

14 Covered her face with a veil. "Covered" is a transitive verb, but the Hebrew does not have "her face" or any other object. The implication is that she "covered herself" (OJPS). **Wrapping herself up**. This is where she hides her face. **At the entrance to Enaim**. Enaim most certainly is a place name. Some say there were two springs of water (called *enaim* in Hebrew) by the side of the road, forming a kind of "entrance." In any case, Judah passed by this location on his way to the sheepshearing.

KIMHI **14 Covered her face with a veil**. So that Judah could not recognize her. **Wrapping herself up**. In attractive clothing.

NAHMANIDES for their transgression" (Job 8:4), and Tamar had nothing to do with it. In my view, Shelah was technically old enough to "do his duty" by her, but Judah was afraid he was so young that he might do the same as his brothers did. For they were young too; neither of them could have been older than 12. **[C]** When Shelah got older, Judah would have a serious talk with him and give Tamar to him as his wife. But she waited long enough that to her Shelah seemed grown up. His father, though, still considered him too young—for he was not yet 10 years old—and wanted to wait longer. But Tamar's desire to bear offspring of the holy seed was so great that she hastened to do what she did.

12 Judah went up to Timnah to his sheepshearers. He did this every day, to make himself feel better, distracting himself by keeping busy with the flock so he could forget his loss. Tamar found out that he was going there every day and lay in wait for him on one such day. Or perhaps Judah was so rich that everyone gathered at the royal banquet he made at the time of sheepshearing; all the poor people would head there. That would be how Tamar found out where he was going.

[C] It would seem that Nahmanides is trying to fit this episode into the chronology of the Joseph story.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **12 Shua's daughter, the wife of Judah, died**. We are never told her name; perhaps she simply went by this name: Shua's daughter, Bath-shua (Bekhor Shor).

13 Judah went up to Timnah to his sheepshearers. Sheepshearing was always a good time with a lot of feasting; see the stories about Nabal in 1 Samuel 25 and Absalom in 2 Samuel 13. Lust is more likely to overcome a man when he is having a good time, which is why Tamar decided to do this during the sheepshearing (Bekhor Shor). For Judah, who fathered two righteous sons by her, this was "going up"; for Samson, who had his eyes gouged out by the Philistines, going to Timnah was "going down." And should you wonder why the Holy One agreed to this unseemly beginning for the kings of Judah, you must realize that it was better for them to descend from Tamar, the daughter of Shem, than from Judah's original Canaanite wife. Besides, since Shelah did not fulfill this duty, Judah was next in line and what she did was totally aboveboard (Hizkuni).

14 So she took off her widow's garb. She assumed Judah would ask her why she had taken it off. She intended to reply that it was time to take it off, because **Shelah was grown up**—which according to what he told her in v. 11 was meant to indicate the end of her widowhood (Sforno).

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NJPS to him as wife. 15When Judah saw her, he took her for a harlot; for she had covered her face. 16So he turned aside to her by the road and said, "Here, let me sleep with you"—for he did not know that she was his daughter-in-law. "What," she asked, "will you pay for sleeping with me?" 17He replied, "I will send a kid from my flock." But she said, "You must leave a pledge until you have sent it." 18And he said, "What pledge shall I give you?" She replied, "Your seal and cord, and the staff which you carry." So he gave them to her and slept with her, and

לֹא־נִתְּנָה לוֹ לְאִשָּׁה׃ 15 וַיִּרְאֶהָ יְהוּדָה
וַיַּחְשְׁבֶהָ לְזוֹנָה כִּי כִסְּתָה פָּנֶיהָ׃ 16 וַיֵּט
אֵלֶיהָ אֶל־הַדֶּרֶךְ וַיֹּאמֶר הֲבָה־נָּא אָבוֹא
אֵלַיִךְ כִּי לֹא יָדַע כִּי כַלָּתוֹ הִוא וַתֹּאמֶר
מַה־תִּתֶּן־לִי כִּי תָבוֹא אֵלָי׃ 17 וַיֹּאמֶר
אָנֹכִי אֲשַׁלַּח גְּדִי־עִזִּים מִן־הַצֹּאן וַתֹּאמֶר
אִם־תִּתֵּן עֵרָבוֹן עַד שָׁלְחֶךָ׃ 18 וַיֹּאמֶר מָה
הָעֵרָבוֹן אֲשֶׁר אֶתֵּן־לָךְ וַתֹּאמֶר חֹתָמְךָ
וּפְתִילֶךָ וּמַטְּךָ אֲשֶׁר בְּיָדֶךָ וַיִּתֶּן־לָהּ וַיָּבֹא

OJPS not given unto him to wife. 15When Judah saw her, he thought her to be a harlot; for she had covered her face. 16And he turned unto her by the way, and said: "Come, I pray thee, let me come in unto thee"; for he knew not that she was his daughter-in-law. And she said: "What wilt thou give me, that thou mayest come in unto me?" 17And he said: "I will send thee a kid of the goats from the flock." And she said: "Wilt thou give me a pledge, till thou send it?" 18And he said: "What pledge shall I give thee?" And she said: "Thy signet and thy cord, and thy staff that is in thy hand." And he gave them to her, and came in unto her, and she

RASHI **15 He took her for a harlot.** Because she was at the crossroad. **For she had covered her face.** So that he could not recognize her. According to a midrash, "she had covered her face" in her father-in-law's house, where she had always acted with extreme modesty. So he never suspected this was her.

16 So he turned aside to her by the road. He turned off the road he was on to the road where she was—he took a "detour," as we say in French. **Here.** The Hebrew word always conveys a request or invitation of some kind, in this case, "Prepare yourself to sleep with me." The literal meaning of the verb is "give," and it is sometimes used in that more literal way; even when used as an invitation it comes somewhat close to that meaning.

18 Your seal and cord. Rather, as Onkelos translates, "your ring and your cloak"—your signet ring and the cloak you are wearing. **And she conceived by him.** Literally "to him." She conceived sons whose heroism and righteousness were comparable to his.

KIMHI **15 For she had covered her face.** If the midrash that she was so modest she had covered her face in Judah's house is correct, it must be that here at the crossroads it simply never crossed Judah's mind that it could be the same woman.

18 Cord. Perhaps the strip of cloth wrapped around his head.

RASHBAM **15 She had covered her face.** She had just now done so. This says plainly what "wrapping herself up" (v. 14) merely implied.

17 Until you have sent it. "Send" in the Qal (as here) implies sending *someone* who would bring the kid. **[F]** This use of the Qal is quite normal in sending gifts; compare "they are a gift *sent* to my lord Esau" (32:19). And indeed "Judah sent the kid by his friend the Adullamite" (v. 20); see also v. 23.

18 Your seal. Your signet ring. **And cord.** Your sash. **And the staff which you carry.** These are easy to give as a pledge because none of them is an article of clothing.

[F] In the Piel the same verb means "to release." See Special Topics, "Biblical Hebrew."

NAHMANIDES **15 He took her for a harlot; for she had covered her face.** Rashi's comment takes for granted that it was normal to encounter prostitutes at a crossroads: "She sits in the doorway of her house, or on a chair at the heights of the town, calling to all the wayfarers" (Prov. 9:14–15). As for the midrash he cites, if her face was always covered when she was in Judah's house, how could Judah have recognized her at all? That is why he "he did not know that she was his daughter-in-law" (v. 16). However, the more pertinent reason Judah took her for a prostitute is precisely that her face was covered. The veil was a normal part of a prostitute's garb; she would take her seat at a crossroads wrapped in a scarf with which she partially covered her hair and her face, painting her eyes and her lips, and revealing her neck. Because she would brazenly call the man and "lay hold of him and kiss him" (Prov. 7:13), she would partially cover her face. Prostitutes by the side of the road may sometimes end up having sex with relatives—another reason why they cover their faces. The male prostitutes in our own countries nowadays do the same, so that when they come back into town no one will know it was them. M. Kel. 24:16 tells us that a harlot's hairnet is not subject to becoming ritually impure. For she does not sleep on it or wear it as a garment, but uses it as ornamentation, leaving her hair half visible and half not.

18 Your seal and cord. I don't know why Rashi thinks a cloak could be called a "cord," nor whether he really thought Judah left his cloak with her and went home naked. (Notice that "cord" is in the plural in v. 25; see OJPS. How many cloaks did Judah give her?) If you think that the "*fringes* on the corners of their garments" (Num. 15:38) might have led to a cloak being referred to as "threads," think again. Would Judah, God forbid, have observed the commandment to wear ritual fringes and then given them to someone in payment for sex? Perhaps a headband could somehow be called a "cord," but Onkelos never uses this Aramaic word to refer to an actual garment. (It does not have that meaning in Deut. 22:17.) We do find Targum Jonathan using this word for a strip of cloth of the kind that is still worn in the East around one's head—a turban. Now, it is quite possible that Judah had a symbol of his own, the image of a lion or some such thing, and he would have had cords to carry this image to use it for sealing documents. **[D] The staff which you carry.** As a symbol of mastership and rulership, "a scepter to rule with" (Ezek. 19:14). We will read shortly that "the scepter shall not depart from Judah" (49:10). All these are what he gave her.

[D] There is some confusion in our texts of Nahmanides here; this is the most likely meaning.

IBN EZRA **15 She had covered her face.** When she "wrapped herself up" (v. 14). One commentator takes the expression to mean that she "covered" her face with makeup—based on what he saw his daughter do. But we don't bring scholarly proofs from the behavior of idiots. (What our Sages say about her modest behavior while in her father-in-law's house is of course also true.)

18 Your seal and cord, and the staff which you carry. His lust was so great that he gave her all three of these important items for such a frivolous thing.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **16 What will you pay for sleeping with me?** Judah did not realize who she was, so she spoke up, expecting that he would recognize her voice (Sforno).

17 You must leave a pledge until you have sent it. She wanted signs so she could identify him later (Bekhor Shor).

18 Your seal and cord, and the staff which you carry. All of which he used regularly: the staff, to walk with, and the cord and seal to tie and seal the bundles of wool (Hizkuni). The "cord" was actually a "fringed" handkerchief (Abarbanel).

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NJPS she conceived by him. [19]Then she went on her way. She took off her veil and again put on her widow's garb.

[20]Judah sent the kid by his friend the Adullamite, to redeem the pledge from the woman; but he could not find her. [21]He inquired of the people of that town, "Where is the cult prostitute, the one at Enaim, by the road?" But they said, "There has been no prostitute here." [22]So he returned to Judah and said, "I could not find her; moreover, the townspeople said: There has been no prostitute here." [23]Judah said, "Let her keep them, lest we become a laughingstock. I did send her this kid, but you did not find her."

[24]About three months later, Judah was told, "Your daughter-in-law Tamar has played the harlot; in fact, she is with child by harlotry." "Bring her out," said Judah,

OJPS conceived by him. [19]And she arose, and went away, and put off her veil from her, and put on the garments of her widowhood.

[20]And Judah sent the kid of the goats by the hand of his friend the Adullamite, to receive the pledge from the woman's hand; but he found her not. [21]Then he asked the men of her place, saying: "Where is the harlot, that was at Enaim by the wayside?" And they said: "There hath been no harlot here." [22]And he returned to Judah, and said: "I have not found her; and also the men of the place said: There hath been no harlot here." [23]And Judah said: "Let her take it, lest we be put to shame; behold, I sent this kid, and thou hast not found her."

[24]And it came to pass about three months after, that it was told Judah, saying: "Tamar thy daughter-in-law hath played the harlot; and moreover, behold, she is with child by harlotry." And Judah said:

אֵלֶיהָ וַתַּהַר לוֹ׃ 19 וַתָּקָם וַתֵּלֶךְ וַתָּסַר
צְעִיפָהּ מֵעָלֶיהָ וַתִּלְבַּשׁ בִּגְדֵי אַלְמְנוּתָהּ׃
20 וַיִּשְׁלַח יְהוּדָה אֶת־גְּדִי הָעִזִּים בְּיַד
רֵעֵהוּ הָעֲדֻלָּמִי לָקַחַת הָעֵרָבוֹן מִיַּד
הָאִשָּׁה וְלֹא מְצָאָהּ׃ 21 וַיִּשְׁאַל אֶת־אַנְשֵׁי
מְקֹמָהּ לֵאמֹר אַיֵּה הַקְּדֵשָׁה הִוא בָּעֵינַיִם
עַל־הַדָּרֶךְ וַיֹּאמְרוּ לֹא־הָיְתָה בָזֶה קְדֵשָׁה׃
22 וַיָּשָׁב אֶל־יְהוּדָה וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא מְצָאתִיהָ
וְגַם אַנְשֵׁי הַמָּקוֹם אָמְרוּ לֹא־הָיְתָה בָזֶה
קְדֵשָׁה׃ 23 וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוּדָה תִּקַּח־לָהּ פֶּן
נִהְיֶה לָבוּז הִנֵּה שָׁלַחְתִּי הַגְּדִי הַזֶּה וְאַתָּה
לֹא מְצָאתָהּ׃
24 וַיְהִי | כִּמְשֻׁלָּשׁ חֳדָשִׁים וַיֻּגַּד לִיהוּדָה
לֵאמֹר זָנְתָה תָּמָר כַּלָּתֶךָ וְגַם הִנֵּה
הָרָה לִזְנוּנִים וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוּדָה הוֹצִיאוּהָ

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ How could Judah simply announce, "Bring her out and let her be burned" (v. 24) without examining her? Who gave Judah the final say in this case? Even if he really was the chief judge, no one is allowed to judge a case involving his relatives, let alone himself.

RASHI **21 The cult prostitute.** The Hebrew is a single word, related to "sanctification," meaning in this case a woman who "devoted" herself to prostitution.

23 Let her keep them. OJPS translates more literally, but NJPS has the sense. **Lest we become a laughingstock.** If you keep looking for her, the whole story will come out and I will look bad. What else should I do to keep my promise? **I did send her this kid.** Judah had tricked his father with the kid in whose blood they had dipped Joseph's tunic, so now he in turn was tricked with a kid.

24 About three months later. Rather, "when the months had tripled." This is not the number "three"; the מ is part of the word. Since this was "about" a three-month period, it must mean most of the first month, most of the third month, and all of the month in the middle. **She is with child.** More simply, "she is pregnant." The Hebrew word is an adjective here, not the verb "she has conceived." **Let her be burned.** Ephraim Maksha'ah said in the name of R. Meir: She was the daughter of Shem, who was a priest. That is why she was sentenced to be burnt. **[H]**

[H] See Lev. 21:9.

RASHBAM **21 The cult prostitute.** The Hebrew paradoxically implies that she is "dedicated" for the use of anyone who approaches her: "No Israelite woman shall be a *cult prostitute,* nor shall any Israelite man be a *cult prostitute*" (Deut. 23:18); "there were also male *prostitutes* in the land" (1 Kings 14:24).

23 Let her keep them. I am not going to send this to her again. **Lest we become a laughingstock.** Looking for prostitutes.

24 Your daughter-in-law Tamar has played the harlot. And if you want proof that she has "played the harlot"—**she is with child. And let her be burned.** This was apparently their custom when a woman bound by a levirate obligation got pregnant by someone else.

IBN EZRA **21 The cult prostitute.** See my comment to Deut. 23:18.

23 Let her keep them. Leave her alone and let her keep them. **Lest we become a laughingstock.** Having given my seal and cord and staff for such a frivolous thing. **I did send her this kid, but you did not find her.** This is a sign that she decided she should keep the pledge instead.

24 About three months later. "Three" here has a מ prefix; when it comes to days instead of months, three has the same letter as a suffix! **[F]**

[F] שלשום means "the day before yesterday."

KIMHI **21 He inquired of the people of that town.** More precisely, "of her place" (OJPS). Judah had asked her which street she lived on so that he could send to reclaim his pledge, and she gave him some answer. When the Adullamite went there to look for her, naturally no one had any idea what he was talking about.

NAHMANIDES **24 Bring her out . . . and let her be burned.** Rashi did not really explain what he meant. As far as I understand the discussion on B. Sanh. 51b, a priest's daughter who is waiting for her brother-in-law to marry her is *not* subject to death. **[E]** To me it would seem that Judah's daughter-in-law was being given special treatment because of his own position. It was an offense against the dignity of the sovereign. They brought the situation to Judah prepared to do whatever he might command; he sentenced her to die because his own rank was equivalent to that of a king. It is not that a woman of lower rank would have faced this punishment. But the straightforward sense of the text may be as simple as what happens nowadays in some of the kingdoms in Spain: a woman who cheats on her husband is turned over to him, and he decides whether she is to live or to die. In this case, Tamar was bound to Shelah in what was according to their laws the legal equivalent of marriage.

[E] We omit Nahmanides' more extensive technical discussion of this issue.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **23 This kid.** Not just "a kid," but "this kid," a special one (Gersonides).

24 About three months later. This is when a pregnant woman begins to show (Bekhor Shor). **Bring her out . . . and let her be burned.** Was there no higher authority in those days than Judah? Isaac and Jacob were still living! In fact, all three sat in judgment on her and, as is customary in capital cases, the youngest judge spoke first (Hizkuni).

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NJPS "and let her be burned." 25As she was being brought out, she sent this message to her father-in-law, "I am with child by the man to whom these belong." And she added, "Examine these: whose seal and cord and staff are these?" 26Judah recognized them, and said, "She is more in the right than I, inasmuch as I did not give her to my son Shelah." And he was not intimate with her again.

27When the time came for her to give birth, there were twins in her womb!

OJPS "Bring her forth, and let her be burnt." 25When she was brought forth, she sent to her father-in-law, saying: "By the man, whose these are, am I with child"; and she said: "Discern, I pray thee, whose are these, the signet, and the cords, and the staff." 26And Judah acknowledged them, and said: "She is more righteous than I; forasmuch as I gave her not to Shelah my son." And he knew her again no more.

27And it came to pass in the time of her travail, that, behold, twins were in her

וְתִשָּׂרֵף׃ 25 הִוא מוּצֵאת וְהִיא שָׁלְחָה אֶל־חָמִיהָ לֵאמֹר לְאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר־אֵלֶּה לּוֹ אָנֹכִי הָרָה וַתֹּאמֶר הַכֶּר־נָא לְמִי הַחֹתָמֶת וְהַפְּתִילִים וְהַמַּטֶּה הָאֵלֶּה׃ 26 וַיַּכֵּר יְהוּדָה וַיֹּאמֶר צָדְקָה מִמֶּנִּי כִּי־עַל־כֵּן לֹא־נְתַתִּיהָ לְשֵׁלָה בְנִי וְלֹא־יָסַף עוֹד לְדַעְתָּהּ׃ 27 וַיְהִי בְּעֵת לִדְתָּהּ וְהִנֵּה תְאוֹמִים

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ What did Judah mean by saying, "She is more in the right than I" (v. 26), when neither of them had said anything? ✦ What is the real meaning of the Hebrew phrase that the commentators force into meaning "inasmuch as I did not give her to my son Shelah"?

RASHI **25 As she was being brought out.** To be burnt. **She sent this message to her father-in- law, "I am with child by the man to whom these belong."** She did not want to shame him by saying, "I am with child by you." She reasoned, "If he confesses, let him confess on his own. If he doesn't, let them burn me but let me not shame him." This is the source of the statement on B. Sot. 10b, "It is better to let yourself be thrown into the furnace than to shame someone else in public." **Examine these.** Literally, "acknowledge, please." Acknowledge your Creator and do not let three souls perish.

26 She is more in the right. Rather, "she is right"—she spoke correctly. **Than I.** Rather, "from me"—she spoke correctly: she is pregnant by me. But our Sages understood it to have been spoken by a heavenly voice: "All this comes from Me. Because she acted modestly in her father-in-law's house, I decreed that kings should come forth from her. And I had already decreed that the kings of Israel should descend from Judah." **Inasmuch as I did not give her.** More literally, "[she acted rightly,] for I did not give her." **And he was not intimate with her again.** Others understand it to mean, "and he did not cease to be intimate with her again." See my comment on the same verb in Num. 11:25. **[I]**

27 When the time came for her to give birth. Rather, "when she was giving birth." Contrast what we read of Rebekah: "when her days to be delivered were fulfilled" (25:24, OJPS). Rebekah's twins were born at full term, but these were delivered

[I] See also Deut. 5:19.

RASHBAM **25 As she was being brought out.** After she was brought out, she sent the pledge. Even then, she did not want to reveal who **the man to whom these belong** was.

26 She is more in the right than I. I told her to remain in her father's house until Shelah grew up, so she fulfilled my condition. **I did not give her to my son Shelah.** But I did not fulfill my part of the bargain. — Compare the language in "You are right, not I" (1 Sam. 24:18); "he thought himself right against God" (Job 32:2). **And he was not intimate with her again.** It cannot mean that "he did not cease from" being intimate with her; "from" is simply not there. **[G]**

[G] "From" is missing from Rashbam's comment as well, but this seems to be a scribal error.

IBN EZRA **25 As she was being brought out.** Grammatically the verb is the same form as in "let this be made known" (Isa. 12:5); the difference in vowels is because the א of our word is elided.

26 Inasmuch as I did not give her. The Hebrew uses the same syntax as in "for to see your face" (33:10). She is more in the right than I, "inasmuch as I did not give her"—that is the explanation of the Sages. Or perhaps it means "she did this because" I did not give her. **And he was not intimate with her again.** He did not have sex with her.

KIMHI **25 Cord.** The Hebrew word is plural (see OJPS). The garment or turban or whatever it was must have been made of multiple strips of cloth.

26 And he was not intimate with her again. Having been intimate with her the first time under such embarrassing circumstances. This would happen regularly with Judah's offspring. David was descended from Ruth the Moabite and Solomon from Bathsheba—all so that the kings of Judah would remember the rock from which they were hewn and rule with humility and integrity.

27 When the time came for her to give birth, there were twins in her womb! Rebekah knew in advance that she was carrying twins, but Tamar did not; Rebekah's

NAHMANIDES **26 She is more in the right than I.** See Rashi's comment. But Judah is saying essentially the same words Saul said to David in 1 Sam. 24:18, "You are right, not I." "She is right, and I wronged her by not giving my son Shelah to her." The further implication is that if Shelah did not want to do his duty as a brother-in-law, the next in line for the duty was Judah himself; see my comment to v. 9. **And he was not intimate with her again.** Once he had provided offspring for his son, he did not wish to be with her any longer, though it was permissible to him. For she was not merely not forbidden to him; according to the rules, she was now legally married to him. This is at the heart of the translation "he did not *cease to be* intimate with her again."

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **25 As she was being brought out.** Even at this tense moment, she did not panic; she had the heart of a lion (Sforno). **She sent this message to her father-in-law.** This is one of only 11 times in the Torah that "she" is spelled normally, with a י, as opposed to a ו (Masorah).

26 She is more in the right than I. If I condemn her now, I simultaneously condemn myself (Hizkuni). I cheated her out of something she had a right to by not giving my son Shelah to her (Gersonides). We both acted correctly. But she did it consciously and for a noble purpose and I did it merely to satisfy a physical desire; she knew Er and Onan had died because of their sins, while I thought they died because of her. But here I am safe and sound, and here she is, pregnant by me (Abarbanel). **And he was not intimate with her again.** He was embarrassed to do so, since she was his daughter-in-law (Hizkuni). He was afraid he too might die as his sons had (Gersonides).

27 There were twins in her womb! The midwife could tell. That is why she tied a thread on the one who put out his hand (Bekhor Shor). The Holy One replaced Judah's sinful sons, Er and Onan, with these two righteous sons (Abarbanel).

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בְּבִטְנָהּ׃ 28 וַיְהִי בְלִדְתָּהּ וַיִּתֵּן־יָד וַתִּקַּח הַמְיַלֶּדֶת וַתִּקְשֹׁר עַל־יָדוֹ שָׁנִי לֵאמֹר זֶה יָצָא רִאשֹׁנָה׃ 29 וַיְהִי | כְּמֵשִׁיב יָדוֹ וְהִנֵּה יָצָא אָחִיו וַתֹּאמֶר מַה־פָּרַצְתָּ עָלֶיךָ פָּרֶץ וַיִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ פָּרֶץ׃ 30 וְאַחַר יָצָא אָחִיו אֲשֶׁר עַל־יָדוֹ הַשָּׁנִי וַיִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ זָרַח׃ ס

חמישי

לט וְיוֹסֵף הוּרַד מִצְרָיְמָה וַיִּקְנֵהוּ פּוֹטִיפַר סְרִיס פַּרְעֹה שַׂר הַטַּבָּחִים אִישׁ מִצְרִי מִיַּד הַיִּשְׁמְעֵאלִים אֲשֶׁר הוֹרְדֻהוּ

NJPS [28]While she was in labor, one of them put out his hand, and the midwife tied a crimson thread on that hand, to signify: This one came out first. [29]But just then he drew back his hand, and out came his brother; and she said, "What a breach you have made for yourself!" So he was named Perez. [30]Afterward his brother came out, on whose hand was the crimson thread; he was named Zerah.

39 When Joseph was taken down to Egypt, a certain Egyptian, Potiphar, a courtier of Pharaoh and his chief steward, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had

OJPS womb. [28]And it came to pass, when she travailed, that one put out a hand; and the midwife took and bound upon his hand a scarlet thread, saying: "This came out first." [29]And it came to pass, as he drew back his hand, that, behold his brother came out; and she said: "Wherefore hast thou made a breach for thyself?" Therefore his name was called Perez. [30]And afterward came out his brother, that had the scarlet thread upon his hand; and his name was called Zerah.

39 And Joseph was brought down to Egypt; and Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh's, the captain of the guard, an Egyptian, bought him of the hand of the Ishmaelites, that had brought him down

RASHI prematurely. **There were twins in her womb!** "Twins" is spelled fully here, with an א, but in 25:24 it is spelled without the א. One of those twins was wicked, but both of these were righteous.

29 What a breach you have made for yourself! You have strong-armed your way out.

30 On whose hand was the crimson thread. "Hand" occurs four times in vv. 28–30, corresponding to the four proscriptions violated by Achan, who descended from him; others think the reference is to the four thefts Achan perpetrated. **[J]** See Genesis Rabbah. **He was named Zerah.** Because of how the crimson thread "shone" (*zaraḥ*).

39:1 When Joseph was taken down to Egypt. The text returns to the story of Joseph, which was interrupted so that the story of Judah could be juxtaposed to it, both to indicate that the brothers brought Judah "down" from his greatness on account of Joseph's sale and to compare Potiphar's wife with Tamar. For each of them was acting for the sake

[J] See Joshua 7.

KIMHI twins produced two rival kingdoms, while with Tamar, only the boy who made a breach would produce a kingdom.

29 What a breach you have made for yourself! If your brother dies because of this breach you made, you are responsible. **So he was named Perez.** Rather, "so he [Judah] named him Perez."

30 He was named Zerah. Again, the text really says, "he [Judah] named him Zerah."

39:**1 When Joseph was taken down to Egypt.** The Hebrew does not say "when"; the text is repeating this in order to resume the narrative from the point in 37:28 where "Joseph was taken down to Egypt."

NAHMANIDES **29 What a breach you have made for yourself!** Rashi takes it to mean, "You have strong-armed your way out," but this verb always refers to breaking through a fence: "I will *break down* its wall, that it may be trampled" (Isa. 5:5); "Why did You *breach* its wall so that every passerby plucks its fruit?" (Ps. 80:13). Metaphorically, it can refer to crossing any kind of boundary, which explains 28:14 and 30:43. This baby was doing something of the same kind in his hurry to be born. He made the breach "for himself" in the sense that he was, as it were, imprisoned in the womb and trying to bust out. (As for Ibn Ezra's comment, what exactly is his point?) *Sefer ha-Bahir* discusses a mystery in the names of these two children: "Zerah was named after the sun, which is always shining [*zoraḥat*]; Perez was named after the moon, which sometimes is broken through [*nipreẓet*] and sometimes built up. — But Perez was the first-born, though the sun is greater than the moon! — That poses no problem: First 'one of them put out his hand, and the midwife tied a crimson thread on that hand, to signify: This one came out first.' Then Perez 'made a breach,' after which 'his brother came out, on whose hand was the crimson thread; he was named Zerah.'" Their opinion was that Perez was equated with the moon because the dynasty of David would descend from him. The moon is most definitely a twin to the sun, and Perez was certainly a twin to Zerah, who put out his hand. Perez became the first-born of the pair through intervention from on high: "I will appoint him first-born, highest of the kings of the earth" (Ps. 89:28). All this is why we say, during the Sanctification of the Moon, "David, king of Israel, lives and endures!" One who is enlightened will understand.

RASHBAM **30 Zerah.** From the "crimson" thread; the name Zerah implies a red sheen: "Next morning, when they rose, the sun was *shining* over the water, and from the distance the water appeared to the Moabites as red as blood" (2 Kings 3:22). According to B. BB 84a, the sun actually is red, though it is too bright for us to see that except at dawn and twilight.

39:1 His chief steward. Rather, "the captain of the guard" (OJPS), the warden of the prison, who was in charge of the prisoners and of those condemned to death.

IBN EZRA **28 One of them put out his hand.** "One of them" is not in the Hebrew, but that is most certainly the sense of the expression. The text could not tell us which one did it because he had not yet been named. All this was quite miraculous—that both amniotic sacs broke at the same time and that this one pulled back his hand and his brother was born first.

29 What a breach you have made for yourself! Like busting through a fence. You are responsible for the breach! — But others take the verb simply to mean "spread out," as in 28:14. The Hebrew actually says, "You have breached a breach for yourself." Saadia takes the verb literally, but understands the second use of the word to carry a similar meaning to "has grown" of 30:30.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **39:1 Joseph was taken down to Egypt.** The beginning of the Jewish people's first enslavement was preceded, in 38:29, by the birth of Perez, the ancestor of their final redeemer, the Messiah (Hizkuni). Joseph was "taken down" at exactly the same time that Judah "went down," as OJPS tells us in 38:1 (Sforno). **A certain Egyptian, Potiphar, a courtier of Pharaoh and his chief steward, bought him from the Ishmaelites.** The Holy One, in His great providence, made sure that the Ishmaelites did not keep him with the caravan, nor take him to some far-off land, nor sell him into a life of drudgery, but made him a servant in the house of an Egyptian official, where he could live comfortably (Abarbanel).

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NJPS brought him there. [2]The LORD was with Joseph, and he was a successful man; and he stayed in the house of his Egyptian master. [3]And when his master saw that the LORD was with him and that the LORD lent success to everything he undertook, [4]he took a liking to Joseph. He made him his personal attendant and put him in charge of his household, placing in his hands all that he owned. [5]And from the time that the Egyptian put him in charge of his household and of all that he owned, the LORD blessed his house for Joseph's sake, so that the blessing of the LORD was upon everything that he owned, in the house and outside. [6]He left all that he had in Joseph's hands and, with him there, he paid attention to nothing save the food that he ate. Now Joseph was well built and handsome.

OJPS thither. [2]And the LORD was with Joseph, and he was a prosperous man; and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian. [3]And his master saw that the LORD was with him, and that the LORD made all that he did to prosper in his hand. [4]And Joseph found favor in his sight, and he ministered unto him. And he appointed him overseer over his house, and all that he had he put into his hand. [5]And it came to pass from the time that he appointed him overseer in his house, and over all that he had, that the LORD blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; and the blessing of the LORD was upon all that he had, in the house and in the field. [6]And he left all that he had in Joseph's hand; and, having him, he knew not aught save the bread which he did eat. And Joseph was of beautiful form, and fair to look upon.

שָׁמָּה׃ [2] וַיְהִי יְהוָה אֶת־יוֹסֵף וַיְהִי אִישׁ מַצְלִיחַ וַיְהִי בְּבֵית אֲדֹנָיו הַמִּצְרִי׃ [3] וַיַּרְא אֲדֹנָיו כִּי יְהוָה אִתּוֹ וְכֹל אֲשֶׁר־הוּא עֹשֶׂה יְהוָה מַצְלִיחַ בְּיָדוֹ׃ [4] וַיִּמְצָא יוֹסֵף חֵן בְּעֵינָיו וַיְשָׁרֶת אֹתוֹ וַיַּפְקִדֵהוּ עַל־בֵּיתוֹ וְכָל־יֶשׁ־לוֹ נָתַן בְּיָדוֹ׃ [5] וַיְהִי מֵאָז הִפְקִיד אֹתוֹ בְּבֵיתוֹ וְעַל כָּל־אֲשֶׁר יֶשׁ־לוֹ וַיְבָרֶךְ יְהוָה אֶת־בֵּית הַמִּצְרִי בִּגְלַל יוֹסֵף וַיְהִי בִּרְכַּת יְהוָה בְּכָל־אֲשֶׁר יֶשׁ־לוֹ בַּבַּיִת וּבַשָּׂדֶה׃ [6] וַיַּעֲזֹב כָּל־אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ בְּיַד־יוֹסֵף וְלֹא־יָדַע אִתּוֹ מְאוּמָה כִּי אִם־הַלֶּחֶם אֲשֶׁר־הוּא אוֹכֵל וַיְהִי יוֹסֵף יְפֵה־תֹאַר וִיפֵה מַרְאֶה׃

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why does v. 2 insist on using the verb *va-yehi* ("was") three times (see OJPS)? ✦ Why must we be told first that Joseph's master "put him in charge of his household" (v. 4), again that he "placed in his hands all that he owned," and yet again in v. 6 that "he left all that he had in Joseph's hands"?

RASHI of heaven. Potiphar's wife knew from her astrologers that she would have descendants fathered by Joseph, but she did not know whether they would be borne by her or by her daughter. **[K]**

3 The LORD was with him. That is, the holy name was constantly on his lips.

4 All that he owned. Literally, "all he owned"—"that" is understood, but not explicitly written in the Hebrew.

6 He paid attention to nothing. Again OJPS translates more literally but NJPS has the sense. **Save the food that he ate.** A euphemistic reference to his wife. **Now Joseph was well built and handsome.** Finding himself in charge, he began to eat and drink and curl his hair. Said the Holy One: Your father is in mourning and you are curling your hair? I am going to unleash the bear on you! Which happened immediately.

[K] See Rashi's comment to 41:45.

RASHBAM **6 He paid attention to nothing.** In the house. **Save the food that he ate.** He had no idea where anything came from or how it got to him until he saw it on his plate and ate it. The Hebrew word does not necessarily mean "bread" (OJPS) but can refer to any kind of food: "a great *banquet*" (Dan. 5:1); "my groaning serves as my bread" (Job 3:24), i.e., "my food." With Joseph there, he paid no attention to anything in the house until mealtime.

IBN EZRA **39:6 He paid attention to nothing save the food that he ate.** Some take "the food that he ate" as a euphemism for "sex with his wife." That is far-fetched enough in itself, and even more so when you remember that Potiphar was a eunuch. (See "courtier" in the translation of v. 1 if you want a euphemism!) What I think is that Potiphar's food was the only thing Joseph, being a Hebrew, was not allowed to touch. As will be explained shortly, "the Egyptians could not dine with the Hebrews, since that would be abhorrent to the Egyptians" (43:32). And Potiphar of course knew that Joseph was a Hebrew; his wife mentions it in v. 14. **Now Joseph was well built and handsome.** He was as good-looking as his mother.

NAHMANIDES **39:3 That the LORD was with him.** Rashi's suggestion seems unlikely. His master saw how much better things were going with Joseph in charge than with anyone else, and he knew that God was responsible. Don't forget "We now see plainly that the LORD has been with you" (26:28). That is why "he took a liking to Joseph . . . and put him in charge of his household" (v. 4). The midrash that Joseph was constantly whispering and that he served hot drinks the instant his master requested them is a way of explaining how an Egyptian, who would not know the Lord, could see "that the LORD was with him" (v. 3). The Egyptian assumed that Joseph was performing magic, which was a common thing in Egypt, until he was shown in a vision of some kind that Joseph's powers came from on high.

4 Placing in his hands all that he owned. Putting him in charge of everything in the house and on his lands.

6 Save the food that he ate. A euphemism, as our Sages said. But Ibn Ezra's comment about the Egyptians not letting Hebrews touch their food is possibly correct as well. Perhaps, though, it means "nothing save the food that he, Joseph, ate"—his master knew nothing whatever about Joseph indulging in other pleasures (as most young men are accustomed to do). Nor did Joseph accumulate wealth and possessions. Compare what Achish says about David: "He has been with me for a year or more, and *I have found nothing with him* from the day he defected until now" (1 Sam. 29:3). So our phrase is different from "my master gives no thought to anything in this house" (v. 8). Our phrase is ruling out the possibility that Joseph has taken anything; in v. 8, Joseph is making a positive statement about his master. **[F] Now Joseph was well built and handsome.** We are told this to explain why "his master's wife cast her eyes upon" him (v. 7). Rashi suggests this was a result of the fact that he found himself in charge.

[F] Nahmanides' comment is difficult; he seems to be saying that v. 6 is a negation, while v. 8 is an assertion.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **2 The LORD was with Joseph.** To keep him from becoming impure now that he was among the nations (Bekhor Shor).

6 He paid attention to nothing. He did not ask to see the accounts, as would normally be expected (Abarbanel). **Now Joseph was well built and handsome.** Now that he was in charge of the household, he forgot his troubles and his home, and his good looks returned (Bekhor Shor).

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NJPS 7After a time, his master's wife cast her eyes upon Joseph and said, "Lie with me." 8But he refused. He said to his master's wife, "Look, with me here, my master gives no thought to anything in this house, and all that he owns he has placed in my hands. 9He wields no more authority in this house than I, and he has withheld nothing from me except yourself, since you are his wife. How then could I do this most wicked thing, and sin before God?" 10And much as she coaxed Joseph day after day, he did not yield to her request to lie beside her, to be with her.

11One such day, he came into the house to do his work. None of the household

OJPS 7And it came to pass after these things, that his master's wife cast her eyes upon Joseph; and she said: "Lie with me." 8But he refused, and said unto his master's wife: "Behold, my master, having me, knoweth not what is in the house, and he hath put all that he hath into my hand; 9he is not greater in this house than I; neither hath he kept back any thing from me but thee, because thou art his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" 10And it came to pass, as she spoke to Joseph day by day, that he hearkened not unto her, to lie by her, or to be with her.

11And it came to pass on a certain day, when he went into the house to do his work, and there was none of the men of

7 וַיְהִי אַחַר הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה וַתִּשָּׂא אֵשֶׁת־ ✦ פעמי
אֲדֹנָיו אֶת־עֵינֶיהָ אֶל־יוֹסֵף וַתֹּאמֶר שִׁכְבָה
עִמִּי׃ 8 וַיְמָאֵן | וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל־אֵשֶׁת אֲדֹנָיו
הֵן אֲדֹנִי לֹא־יָדַע אִתִּי מַה־בַּבַּיִת וְכֹל
אֲשֶׁר־יֶשׁ־לוֹ נָתַן בְּיָדִי׃ 9 אֵינֶנּוּ גָדוֹל בַּבַּיִת
הַזֶּה ׀ מִמֶּנִּי וְלֹא־חָשַׂךְ מִמֶּנִּי מְאוּמָה כִּי
אִם־אוֹתָךְ בַּאֲשֶׁר אַתְּ־אִשְׁתּוֹ וְאֵיךְ אֶעֱשֶׂה
הָרָעָה הַגְּדוֹלָה הַזֹּאת וְחָטָאתִי לֵאלֹהִים׃
10 וַיְהִי כְּדַבְּרָהּ אֶל־יוֹסֵף יוֹם | יוֹם וְלֹא־
שָׁמַע אֵלֶיהָ לִשְׁכַּב אֶצְלָהּ לִהְיוֹת עִמָּהּ׃
11 וַיְהִי כְּהַיּוֹם הַזֶּה וַיָּבֹא הַבַּיְתָה לַעֲשׂוֹת
מְלַאכְתּוֹ וְאֵין אִישׁ מֵאַנְשֵׁי הַבַּיִת שָׁם

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why did Joseph's master's wife insist on telling this sordid story? After all, "a season is set for everything, a time for every experience under heaven" (Eccles. 3:1). Next time she might be able to persuade him, no matter how foolish a thing that would have been to do.

RASHI **7 After a time.** Rather, "immediately after." The word *aḥarei* can mean any time afterward, but *aḥar*, used here, means "immediately after."

9 And sin before God. All the descendants of Noah had already been forbidden to commit adultery.

10 To lie beside her. Even without having sex. **To be with her.** In the World to Come.

11 One such day. Rather, "on a certain day" (OJPS), a festival day of theirs, when everyone was at the temple. But the Hebrew calls attention to itself: "Like unto this day." She thought, "There is no time like the present! I will never have a better opportunity to have sex with Joseph than this." She told the others, "I'm sick. I can't go." **To do his work.** There is a dispute in the Talmud between Rav and Samuel about this. One said that it literally means "to do his work"; the other said that it means that he came "to do the deed"

KIMHI **7 After a time.** Difficult as it might have seemed at first, this—like everything else in the Joseph story—was manipulated by God for Joseph's sake and for the sake of his family. The story reminds us that whenever something difficult happens to us, we must trust in God. It of course also lets us learn from Joseph's righteous behavior not to give in to our desires but to keep faith with those who trust in us, no matter who they are.

9 He has withheld nothing from me except yourself, since you are his wife. This lends support to the midrashic interpretation of "the food that he ate" (v. 6). Or perhaps, seeing that Joseph was good-looking, Potiphar had specifically warned him not to touch her. **How then could I do this most wicked thing.** To sleep with his wife and lie to him about it. **And sin before God.** Violating the rule that a man "clings to his wife" (2:24) and not to the wife of another man.

11 One such day. One day when she had been coaxing him in this way.

RASHBAM **9 He has withheld nothing from me**—from my authority—**except yourself.**

10 To be with her. He was careful not even to be alone with her until the day when it happened that he came to work and found no one else there but her. There is a midrash that they had all gone to see the Nile, which had overflowed.

IBN EZRA **10 To lie beside her.** Even literally just to lie down next to her. **To be with her.** Just chatting.

11 One such day. Rather, "on that same day," but meaning the same day a week, a month, or (as I imagine is correct) as much as a full year after she told him, "Lie with me." **To do his work.** Whether literally working around the house or simply working on the accounts. For he was in charge of it all. **None of the household being there.** The midrash about this is simply some individual's notion. **[G]**

[G] Ibn Ezra may be alluding to a midrash that "there was no man there" (compare OJPS), hinting that Joseph wanted to have sex with her but was impotent.

NAHMANIDES **8 But he refused. He said to his master's wife.** The text is highlighting the fact that he refused to do her will, though she was "his master's wife." He feared her, but he feared the Lord even more.

9 And sin before God. Rashi's comment is quite correct. But Joseph did not expect a woman to understand that, so he first portrayed it to her as a betrayal of his master, who trusted him, and only that it would also be a sin against God. But Joseph might have meant that the betrayal in and of itself would be a sin against God, whose "eyes are on the trusty men of the land" (Ps. 101:6), and "no impious man can come into His presence" (Job 13:16). All of what Joseph said to her is true, but he did not explicitly mention the divine prohibition against them having sex, since he was speaking to her as from a woman's perspective.

10 To lie beside her. As Ibn Ezra explains, even to lie next to her fully dressed. For we never find sex described as "lying *beside*" someone, but as "Lie *with* me!" (v. 12); "if a man lies *with* her" (Lev. 15:24, using a different Hebrew form); "The city shall be captured, the houses plundered, and the women *violated*" (Zech. 14:2).

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **7 His master's wife cast her eyes upon Joseph.** The Egyptians are related to the Ethiopians, so they were not used to anyone as good-looking as Joseph. This is what aroused her desire for him (Bekhor Shor).

9 And sin before God. Even if no one else found out, God would know (Hizkuni).

10 To lie beside her, to be with her. She thought that if he would not lie with her sexually, his just being with her might quench her desire for him (Gersonides). Under normal circumstances, she would be on a sofa and he would have been expected to sit next to her when they spoke (Abarbanel).

11 One such day. A day like any other (Hizkuni). **He came into the house to do his work.** Since it was daytime, when it is not usual to have sex, it is clear that this statement is to be taken literally (Hizkuni). **None of the household being there inside.** It just so happened that no one else was there (Bekhor Shor).

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NJPS being there inside, [12]she caught hold of him by his garment and said, "Lie with me!" But he left his garment in her hand and got away and fled outside. [13]When she saw that he had left it in her hand and had fled outside, [14]she called out to her servants and said to them, "Look, he had to bring us a Hebrew to dally with us! This one came to lie with me; but I screamed loud. [15]And when he heard me screaming at the top of my voice, he left his garment with me and got away and fled outside." [16]She kept his garment beside her, until his master came home. [17]Then she told him the same story, saying, "The Hebrew slave whom you brought into our house came to me to dally with me; [18]but when I screamed at the top of my voice, he left his garment with me and fled outside."

בַּבָּֽיִת׃ 12 וַתִּתְפְּשֵׂהוּ בִּבִגְדּוֹ לֵאמֹר שִׁכְבָה
עִמִּי וַיַּעֲזֹב בִּגְדוֹ בְּיָדָהּ וַיָּנָס וַיֵּצֵא הַחוּצָה׃
13 וַיְהִי֙ כִּרְאוֹתָ֣הּ כִּֽי־עָזַ֣ב בִּגְדּ֗וֹ בְּיָדָהּ֙ וַיָּנָֽס
הַחוּצָֽה׃ 14 וַתִּקְרָ֞א לְאַנְשֵׁ֤י בֵיתָהּ֙ וַתֹּ֣אמֶר
לָהֶ֔ם לֵאמֹ֖ר רְא֣וּ הֵבִ֣יא לָ֗נוּ אִ֤ישׁ עִבְרִי֙
לְצַחֵ֣ק בָּ֔נוּ בָּ֥א אֵלַ֖י לִשְׁכַּ֣ב עִמִּ֑י וָאֶקְרָ֖א
בְּקֽוֹל גָּדֽוֹל׃ 15 וַיְהִ֗י כְּשָׁמְעוֹ֙ כִּֽי־הֲרִימֹ֣תִי
קוֹלִ֔י וָאֶקְרָ֖א וַיַּעֲזֹ֣ב בִּגְדּ֑וֹ אֶצְלִ֔י וַיָּ֖נָס וַיֵּצֵ֥א
הַחוּצָֽה׃ 16 וַתַּנַּ֥ח בִּגְדּ֖וֹ אֶצְלָ֑הּ עַד־בּ֖וֹא
אֲדֹנָ֥יו אֶל־בֵּיתֽוֹ׃ 17 וַתְּדַבֵּ֤ר אֵלָיו֙ כַּדִּבְרִ֣ים
הָאֵ֔לֶּה לֵאמֹ֗ר בָּ֤א אֵלַי֙ הָעֶ֣בֶד הָעִבְרִ֔י
אֲשֶׁר־הֵבֵ֥אתָ לָּ֖נוּ לְצַחֵ֑ק בִּֽי׃ 18 וַיְהִ֗י
כַּהֲרִימִ֤י קוֹלִי֙ וָאֶקְרָ֔א וַיַּעֲזֹ֥ב בִּגְדּ֖וֹ אֶצְלִ֑י
וַיָּ֖נָס הַחוּצָֽה׃

OJPS the house there within, [12]that she caught him by his garment, saying: "Lie with me." And he left his garment in her hand, and fled, and got him out. [13]And it came to pass, when she saw that he had left his garment in her hand, and was fled forth, [14]that she called unto the men of her house, and spoke unto them, saying: "See, he hath brought in a Hebrew unto us to mock us; he came in unto me to lie with me, and I cried with a loud voice. [15]And it came to pass, when he heard that I lifted up my voice and cried, that he left his garment by me, and fled, and got him out." [16]And she laid up his garment by her, until his master came home. [17]And she spoke unto him according to these words, saying: "The Hebrew servant, whom thou hast brought unto us, came in unto me to mock me. [18]And it came to pass, as I lifted up my voice and cried, that he left his garment by me, and fled out."

RASHI with her. But his father's image appeared before him (and so forth; see B. Sot. 36b). **[L]**

14 Look, he had to bring us a Hebrew to dally with us! She did not identify who "he" was, but she was obviously talking about her husband. **A Hebrew.** A descendant of Eber, someone from "across [*eber*] the river."

17 The Hebrew slave whom you brought into our house came to me to dally with me. The translations (correctly) rearrange the wording of the verse for clarity.

[L] Jacob's image threatens Joseph that his name will not be inscribed on "the shoulder-pieces of the ephod" (Exod. 28:12) along with those of his brothers.

RASHBAM **14 I screamed loud.** Because you were all far away from me. If I had not screamed, he would have lain with me against my will.

IBN EZRA **14 He had to bring us a Hebrew.** "He"—my husband.

KIMHI **14 She called out to her servants.** But "none of the household" was there! However, she called at the top of her lungs (as she says in v. 18) and they came running.

15 He left his garment with me. I was trying to keep him here until you got here, so you could catch him.

17 Then she told him the same story. Literally, "according to these words" (OJPS), that is, she told him more or less the same story she had told the servants even if not in precisely the same words.

NAHMANIDES **12 He left his garment in her hand.** Out of respect for his mistress he did not want to wrest it from her with his superior strength; instead, he slipped out of it (it was an outer garment). She, seeing that he had left it in her hand, was afraid that it might give her away to the servants or to Joseph's master, and preemptively announced that Joseph had taken it off to have sex with her. "But when he saw that I screamed, he panicked and fled." Notice that according to her version "he left his garment *with* me" (v. 15), not "in her hand" as actually happened.

14 Look, he had to bring us a Hebrew to dally with us! The Egyptians hated the Hebrews to such an extent that they "could not dine with the Hebrews, since that would be abhorrent" (43:32). They would not even buy them as slaves except "to be vine-dressers and field hands" (Jer. 52:16), and certainly would not bring them into their houses. She was complaining that her husband had not only brought a Hebrew into their house but had actually put him in charge. "He is 'a slave pampered from youth' [Prov. 29:21]—no wondering he is laughing at us!" That is what she meant by "the Hebrew slave whom you brought into our house" (v. 17). They found it extraordinarily difficult to put up with having a Hebrew in their home. Here in our verse she says "he" had to bring us a Hebrew slave, not mentioning her husband explicitly, either out of respect for him, or as the way it is proper for women to speak of their husbands, or because everyone knew who "he" was. In the book of Job you often find the Holy One referred to by a pronoun when it is obvious whom they are talking about. In a verse like "Now Saul had a concubine named Rizpah, daughter of Aiah; and [Ish-bosheth] said to Abner, 'Why have you lain with my father's concubine?'" (2 Sam. 3:7), you can see that the Hebrew merely says "he said"; it was obvious that it was Ish-bosheth saying this.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **12 But he left his garment in her hand and got away and fled outside.** She was confident he would have to answer to her husband for running out of the house naked (Abarbanel). Correctly translated, he "fled" (OJPS) from the room in haste lest lust overcome him, and "got him out" at a normal pace so no one would ask why he was running (Sforno).

14 Look, he had to bring us a Hebrew to dally with us! He should have gotten a local servant, who would know how to behave. This Hebrew doesn't care what he does; tomorrow he may simply run away (Bekhor Shor). **This one came to lie with me.** Realizing that she would never persuade him, she made up this lie to get him out of the house. She could not look at him without her lust for him being aroused. And she was afraid he might make up some lie about her (Bekhor Shor).

15 He left his garment with me and got away and fled outside. Rather, he "fled, and got him out" (OJPS), just as he had actually done, because she was afraid the servants had noticed; but in v. 18 she will tell her husband that he "fled [all the way] outside," since he would not know that wasn't true (Sforno).

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NJPS [19]When his master heard the story that his wife told him, namely, "Thus and so your slave did to me," he was furious. [20]So Joseph's master had him put in prison, where the king's prisoners were confined. But even while he was there in prison, [21]the LORD was with Joseph: He extended kindness to him and disposed the chief jailer favorably toward him. [22]The chief jailer put in Joseph's charge all the prisoners who

19 וַיְהִי֙ כִּשְׁמֹ֣עַ אֲדֹנָ֔יו אֶת־דִּבְרֵ֥י אִשְׁתּ֖וֹ
אֲשֶׁ֣ר דִּבְּרָ֣ה אֵלָ֑יו לֵאמֹ֗ר כַּדְּבָרִ֤ים הָאֵלֶּה֙
עָשָׂ֣ה לִ֔י עַבְדֶּ֖ךָ וַיִּֽחַר־אַפּֽוֹ׃ 20 וַיִּקַּ֤ח אֲדֹנֵי֙
יוֹסֵ֔ף אֹת֖וֹ וַיִּתְּנֵ֑הוּ אֶל־בֵּ֣ית הַסֹּ֗הַר מְק֛וֹם
אֲשֶׁר־אסורי אֲסִירֵ֥י הַמֶּ֖לֶךְ אֲסוּרִ֑ים וַיְהִי־
שָׁ֖ם בְּבֵ֥ית הַסֹּֽהַר׃ 21 וַיְהִ֤י יְהוָה֙ אֶת־יוֹסֵ֔ף
וַיֵּ֥ט אֵלָ֖יו חָ֑סֶד וַיִּתֵּ֣ן חִנּ֔וֹ בְּעֵינֵ֖י שַׂ֥ר
בֵּית־הַסֹּֽהַר׃ 22 וַיִּתֵּ֣ן שַׂר־בֵּית־הַסֹּהַר֮ בְּיַד־
יוֹסֵף֒ אֵ֚ת כָּל־הָאֲסִירִ֔ם אֲשֶׁ֖ר בְּבֵ֣ית הַסֹּ֑הַר

OJPS [19]And it came to pass, when his master heard the words of his wife, which she spoke unto him, saying: "After this manner did thy servant to me"; that his wrath was kindled. [20]And Joseph's master took him, and put him into the prison, the place where the king's prisoners were bound; and he was there in the prison. [21]But the LORD was with Joseph, and showed kindness unto him, and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison. [22]And the keeper of the prison committed to Joseph's hand all the prisoners

RASHI **19 Thus and so your slave did to me.** She told him the story while they were having sex, which explains why she said "thus and so"—these same kinds of sex acts.

21 He extended kindness to him. Making everyone who saw him treat him kindly.

22 He was the one to carry out everything that was done there. Literally, "everything they were doing." As Onkelos explains, Joseph gave the instructions for everything that was done.

KIMHI **20 But even while he was there in prison.** The Hebrew says merely that "he was there in the prison" (OJPS). His master did not regret putting him there, for he believed his wife. For "the fury of the husband will be passionate; he will show no pity on his day of vengeance" (Prov. 6:34).

NAHMANIDES **19 When his master heard the story.** Rashi's explanation that they were having sex is actually taken from Genesis Rabbah, but it is nonetheless surprising; Joseph's master was a eunuch. The midrash explained how it was that Potiphar became a eunuch (as the word in 37:37 is correctly understood; he must have married his wife before that occurred)—he got Joseph for sex, but the Holy One castrated him. Then too, how could she debase herself that way in her husband's eyes, whether or not she had been forced? Her husband would have been right to have her killed. Why didn't she scream right away, as she eventually did? She had told the servants that Joseph came to her to lie with her, not that he actually did so. If they actually had sex, she would be more likely to hide it from her husband than from the servants. You might suppose she wanted to get her husband angry enough to kill Joseph, but for a servant even attempting to rape his master's wife is enough to earn the death penalty. **Thus and so your slave did to me.** So "thus and so" (according to the midrash) must refer to fondling and not actual intercourse. Remember that Joseph's master was impotent via some illness or injury. But according to the straightforward sense of the text there is no need for such an explanation. "Thus and so" does not mean that she was demonstrating anything; it is just a shorthand way of describing conversation: "The maiden ran and told *all this* to her mother's household" (24:28); "While he was saying *these things* to me" (Dan. 10:15); and there are many more such examples. Or "thus and so" may refer to what she had told the servants earlier. But it is also possible to take the phrase as meaning "he did *such* things," adding emphasis to the remark. That is how the Hebrew phrase is used in "Why does my lord say *such* things?" (44:7) and "*Such* things have befallen me!" (Lev. 10:19). In any case, Joseph's master loved him so much that he did not have him killed. Or perhaps that was achieved miraculously by the Holy One—or perhaps Joseph's master, knowing that Joseph was a righteous man, doubted his wife's words. Genesis Rabbah has him telling Joseph, "I know perfectly well you did nothing wrong. But I can't have any suspicion attached to my children."

20 Joseph's master had him put in prison, where the king's prisoners were confined. According to Ibn Ezra, the word *sohar* ("prison") is Egyptian and had to be further explained by the phrase that follows. The text does explain foreign words in this fashion: "*pur*—which means 'the lot'—was cast before Haman" (Esther 3:7). But his comment can be ignored. The text is telling us about a particular prison, "*the* prison" (OJPS) where the king's prisoners were confined. That is why the cupbearer and the baker will end up there. "The king's prisoners" is most likely not a general term but refers to prisoners whose crimes directly affect the king or the kingdom. Ordinary prisoners were handled by the police and courts and imprisoned elsewhere. Again, Joseph's being put in this special prison was a mark of his master's affection for him. All this was arranged by the Holy One. As for *sohar*, the philologists tell us that it means "dome," being related to the similar word in "Your navel is like a *round* goblet" (Song 7:3). In my view, *sohar* is the dungeon in which prisoners are kept. It is built underground with just a small hole above for putting the prisoners in and to give them light. (The etymologically related Aramaic word means "moon.") A comparable semantic process led to *ẓohar*, as in "Make an *opening* for daylight in the ark" (6:16), which derives from the word for "noon." The difference, of course, is that the opening of the ark was meant to provide a great deal of light and the opening of a dungeon a minimal amount.

IBN EZRA **19 He was furious.** Nonetheless, he did not kill Joseph, because he was not 100 percent certain what had happened.

20 In prison, where the king's prisoners were confined. It is not clear whether *sohar* ("prison") is a Hebrew word or an Egyptian one. If it is Hebrew, why did it have to be explained? It might be like the "steeds" of Esther 8:10, a Persian word explained further in the verse by the expression "bred of the royal stud."

22 He was the one to carry out everything that was done there. More literally, "whatever they were doing, he was doing." Some say this means he was occupied with some trade by which he could earn his living, just as the other prisoners

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **19 He was furious.** Note that it does not say he was furious *at Joseph*. It went without saying that he asked Joseph what was going on, and Joseph told him the whole story (Abarbanel).

20 So Joseph's master had him put in prison. He could not be put to death, for there were no witnesses. It would be a case of "he said, she said." And, even according to her own words, he wanted to rape her but did not succeed (Bekhor Shor). The Egyptian priests checked and saw that Joseph's garment was torn, not hers; that is why he was not killed. As we will see in 47:22, Joseph will ultimately repay them by not taking over their land (Hizkuni).

22 The chief jailer put in Joseph's charge all the prisoners who were in that prison, and he was the one to carry out

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NJPS were in that prison, and he was the one to carry out everything that was done there. [23]The chief jailer did not supervise anything that was in Joseph's charge, because the LORD was with him, and whatever he did the LORD made successful.

OJPS that were in the prison; and whatsoever they did there, he was the doer of it. [23]The keeper of the prison looked not to any thing that was under his hand, because the LORD was with him; and that which he did, the LORD made it to prosper.

וְאֵת כָּל־אֲשֶׁר עֹשִׂים שָׁם הוּא הָיֶה עֹשֶׂה׃
23 אֵין | שַׂר בֵּית־הַסֹּהַר רֹאֶה אֶת־כָּל־
מְאוּמָה בְּיָדוֹ בַּאֲשֶׁר יְהוָה אִתּוֹ וַאֲשֶׁר־
הוּא עֹשֶׂה יְהוָה מַצְלִיחַ׃ ס

40 Some time later, the cupbearer and the baker of the king of Egypt gave offense to their lord the king of Egypt. [2]Pharaoh was angry with his two courtiers, the chief cupbearer and the chief baker, [3]and put them in custody, in the house of the chief steward, in the same prison house where Joseph was confined. [4]The chief steward assigned Joseph to them, and he attended them.

40 And it came to pass after these things, that the butler of the king of Egypt and his baker offended their lord the king of Egypt. [2]And Pharaoh was wroth against his two officers, against the chief of the butlers, and against the chief of the bakers. [3]And he put them in ward in the house of the captain of the guard, into the prison, the place where Joseph was bound. [4]And the captain of the guard charged Joseph to be with them, and he ministered unto them;

שביעי

מ וַיְהִי אַחַר הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה חָטְאוּ
מַשְׁקֵה מֶלֶךְ־מִצְרַיִם וְהָאֹפֶה לַאֲדֹנֵיהֶם
לְמֶלֶךְ מִצְרָיִם׃ 2 וַיִּקְצֹף פַּרְעֹה עַל שְׁנֵי
סָרִיסָיו ׳עַל שַׂר הַמַּשְׁקִים וְעַל שַׂר
הָאוֹפִים׃ 3 וַיִּתֵּן אֹתָם בְּמִשְׁמַר בֵּית שַׂר
הַטַּבָּחִים אֶל־בֵּית הַסֹּהַר מְקוֹם אֲשֶׁר יוֹסֵף
אָסוּר שָׁם׃ 4 וַיִּפְקֹד שַׂר הַטַּבָּחִים אֶת־
יוֹסֵף אִתָּם וַיְשָׁרֶת אֹתָם

RASHI **40:1 Some time later.** **[M]** Since that cursed woman had gotten everyone yapping about Joseph and calling him names, the Holy One brought disgrace on these two, both to turn the invective against the Egyptians themselves and to give the righteous Joseph some relief by this means. **The cupbearer and the baker of the king of Egypt gave offense.** A fly was found in the king's drink and a pebble in his dinner roll. The Hebrew word translated "baker" here refers specifically to bread baking.

4 The chief steward assigned Joseph to them. More precisely, "to be with them" (OJPS). **When they had been in custody for some time.** The Hebrew says merely "days," but this is a Biblical Hebrew idiom for "a year."

[M] See Rashi's comment to "after a time" (39:7). Here the Hebrew word is *aḥar*.

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why are they called "the cupbearer and the baker" when we are first told that they "gave offense to their lord the king" (v. 1), but "courtiers" and "the *chief* cupbearer and the *chief* baker" when we are told in v. 2 that "Pharaoh was angry" with them?

RASHBAM **40:4 The chief steward assigned Joseph to them.** He assigned him to take care of the needs of the other prisoners. **For some time.** A full year, as the Hebrew expression is used in "it may be redeemed until a year has elapsed since its sale; the redemption period shall be a *year*" (Lev. 25:19). The word also has this meaning in 24:55. **[H]**

[H] See Rashi's comment to "some ten days" there.

IBN EZRA were doing. To me it is more plausible that he was taking care of whatever needed to be done (not necessarily that he himself literally "carried it out"). V. 23 would seem to confirm this explanation.

40:1 Gave offense to their lord the king of Egypt. Literally they "sinned" against him, but the translations understand the idiom correctly.

3 In custody, in the house of the chief steward. Not in his home, but in "the building" where they were kept to prevent them from fleeing.

4 The chief steward assigned Joseph to them. Rather, "he remembered Joseph [and brought him to be in custody] with them." All this is how the great Jonah ibn Janah takes it. But in my opinion, the prison house was indeed in his house, where Joseph (already) also was; see v. 3. Joseph was assigned to them to serve them, since as chief cupbearer and chief baker they had high status in Pharaoh's palace.

KIMHI **40:1 Their lord.** The א retains its vowel, which never happens when *adon* follows the conjunction ו or the prepositions ב, כ, and ל, except for this occurrence and six other times. **[B]**

2 The chief cupbearer and the chief baker. The text changes what they were called in v. 1 to make clear that Joseph was serving men of the highest rank.

3 The same prison house where Joseph was confined. The point of the story is that they and their dreams will be responsible for getting him out of prison.

[B] Compare (e.g.) "to my lord" in 44:9 and 16.

NAHMANIDES **40:2 Pharaoh was angry with his two courtiers.** Like Joseph's master, these two were also eunuchs (not "courtiers"). The kings would castrate the chief cupbearer and the chief baker because they had occasion to be in the king's harem. It's true that Onkelos takes this word to mean "courtier" or "officer" (OJPS), both here and in 39:1. Targum Jonathan sometimes does so as well, e.g., 2 Kings 20:18, where NJPS takes it my way: "And some of your sons, your own issue, whom you will have fathered, will be taken to serve as *eunuchs* in the palace of the king of Babylon."

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **everything that was done there.** The poorer prisoners worked at various trades to try to earn money, but they could not be trusted not to try to escape. So Joseph was put in charge of selling what they made to the outsiders who came to buy it (Abarbanel).

23 The chief jailer. Someone appointed by the "captain of the guard" (Bekhor Shor). **Did not supervise anything that was in Joseph's charge.** So Joseph was also able to make a little profit in this way (Abarbanel).

40:1 The cupbearer and the baker of the king of Egypt gave offense to their lord the king of Egypt. The cupbearer watered down the wine and the baker adulterated the flour (Hizkuni).

2 Pharaoh was angry with his two courtiers, the chief cupbearer and the chief baker. Because the lower-ranking cupbearer and baker of v. 1, whom they supervised, had given offense (Abarbanel).

3 And put them in custody. Until he could meet with his advisers to decide what to do with them (Bekhor Shor).

4 When they had been in custody for some time. Literally, for "days," that is, for a year. You must realize that a year is nothing but a long day, and a day is a short year. Each of them has four "seasons," corresponding to the four basic elements and the four bodily humors (Gersonides).

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NJPS When they had been in custody for some time, [5]both of them—the cupbearer and the baker of the king of Egypt, who were confined in the prison—dreamed in the same night, each his own dream and each dream with its own meaning. [6]When Joseph came to them in the morning, he saw that they were distraught. [7]He asked Pharaoh's courtiers, who were with him in custody in his master's house, saying, "Why do you appear downcast today?" [8]And they said to him, "We had dreams, and there is no one to interpret them." So Joseph said to them, "Surely God can interpret! Tell me [your dreams]."

OJPS and they continued a season in ward. [5]And they dreamed a dream both of them, each man his dream, in one night, each man according to the interpretation of his dream, the butler and the baker of the king of Egypt, who were bound in the prison. [6]And Joseph came in unto them in the morning, and saw them, and, behold, they were sad. [7]And he asked Pharaoh's officers that were with him in the ward of his master's house, saying: "Wherefore look ye so sad to-day?" [8]And they said unto him: "We have dreamed a dream, and there is none that can interpret it." And Joseph said unto them: "Do not interpretations belong to God? tell it me, I pray you."

וַיִּהְיוּ יָמִים בְּמִשְׁמָר׃ [5] וַיַּחַלְמוּ חֲלוֹם
שְׁנֵיהֶם אִישׁ חֲלֹמוֹ בְּלַיְלָה אֶחָד אִישׁ
כְּפִתְרוֹן חֲלֹמוֹ הַמַּשְׁקֶה וְהָאֹפֶה אֲשֶׁר
לְמֶלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם אֲשֶׁר אֲסוּרִים בְּבֵית
הַסֹּהַר׃ [6] וַיָּבֹא אֲלֵיהֶם יוֹסֵף בַּבֹּקֶר וַיַּרְא
אֹתָם וְהִנָּם זֹעֲפִים׃ [7] וַיִּשְׁאַל אֶת־סְרִיסֵי
פַרְעֹה אֲשֶׁר אִתּוֹ בְּמִשְׁמַר בֵּית אֲדֹנָיו
לֵאמֹר מַדּוּעַ פְּנֵיכֶם רָעִים הַיּוֹם׃ [8] וַיֹּאמְרוּ
אֵלָיו חֲלוֹם חָלַמְנוּ וּפֹתֵר אֵין אֹתוֹ וַיֹּאמֶר
אֲלֵהֶם יוֹסֵף הֲלוֹא לֵאלֹהִים פִּתְרֹנִים
סַפְּרוּ־נָא לִי׃

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why does v. 5 repeat "the cupbearer and the baker of the king of Egypt, who were confined in the prison," as if we had no idea who they were talking about? ✦ Again, why are we told that Joseph "asked Pharaoh's courtiers" (v. 7) instead of simply that he asked "them"? ✦ Why are we told that each had "his own dream" and later that they had a single dream among them (see v. 8 as correctly translated by OJPS)? ✦ Why are we told that each had a dream "with its own interpretation" (as the Hebrew seems to indicate)? Did the interpretation come packaged along with the dream? If it did, how could they complain that "we had dreams, and there is no one to interpret them" (v. 8)?

RASHI **5 Both of them . . . dreamed.** The straightforward sense is that each of them had a dream. But a midrash reads the Hebrew to say "they dreamed the dream of both of them" (compare OJPS), which they understand to mean that each one dreamed his own dream and the interpretation of the other's dream. This would explain how the chief baker knew "that the interpretation was good" (v. 16, OJPS). **Each dream with its own meaning.** Each of them had a dream that was very close in meaning to what would really end up happening to him.

6 Distraught. For examples that demonstrate the range of meaning of the Hebrew word, see "dispirited and *sullen*" (1 Kings 20:43 and 21:4); "I must bear the *anger* of the LORD" (Mic. 7:9).

KIMHI **5 The cupbearer and the baker.** This is repeated again because each will have a dream matching his job.

7 He asked Pharaoh's courtiers. Seeing how distraught they were, he felt he had to ask. After all, it was his job to take care of them.

8 There is no one to interpret them. They had already asked everyone else who was around. **Surely God can interpret!** After all, God sends these dreams for a purpose. They would go to waste if no one could interpret them.

RASHBAM **5 Each dream with its own meaning.** They were dreams that seemed to have some implied meaning, not simply ordinary meaningless dreams.

8 There is no one to interpret them. For the unusual Hebrew syntax, compare "but will not obey them" (Ezek. 33:32).

IBN EZRA **5 Each dream with its own meaning.** More literally, each with its own "interpretation" (OJPS). Each of them saw that his dream could be interpreted as symbolizing what would happen to him in the future.

6 When Joseph came to them in the morning. Perhaps he slept in the dungeon. **Distraught.** Unsettled, disturbed: "the sea stopped *raging*" (Jon. 1:15).

8 Surely God can interpret! The Holy One knows the future and can show it to someone in a dream if He wants to. Whether I interpret favorably or unfavorably can neither harm nor help. This being so, don't worry about telling your dreams to me. — As for the talmudic statement that "dreams follow their interpretation," that is merely someone's opinion.

NAHMANIDES **5 Each dream with its own meaning.** What the various events in the dream portended for the future. The person who reveals the meaning of the dream is an "interpreter." Some would prefer "each dream with its own explanation"; see Rashi's comment. But why would the cupbearer tell Pharaoh (in 41:11) that each of them had had a dream "with an explanation"? That would seem to minimize the role of the dream interpreter. And what if Pharaoh's dreams were not as obvious as these two? Joseph might not understand them. Ibn Ezra thinks each man understood that he had had a symbolic dream, not a dream that "comes with much detail" (Eccles. 5:2), where only a few of the details come true. And he is quite correct.

7 He asked Pharaoh's courtiers, who were with him in custody in his master's house. What was the need for these extra phrases? Why not just say that he asked them? The text wishes to emphasize Joseph's lowly position, both with regard to them, with regard to his master, and with regard to his being a prisoner. Any one of them could have ordered Joseph's head to be taken off. But he was not afraid of asking them, nor of telling them what he thought the dreams meant. Joseph trusted his own wisdom. For if the baker had gotten off, he certainly would have had Joseph hanged.

8 There is no one to interpret them. No one to make known what the dreams portended for the future. Perhaps that morning they had sent for some of the magicians, or perhaps there were other people in the prison with them who could not interpret the dreams. Or perhaps they meant, "These dreams are so obscure that no one on earth could interpret them!" **Surely God can interpret!** According to Ibn Ezra, Joseph was saying this so that they would not punish him if he said that their dreams portended something evil—for God makes people dream, and He "makes peace and creates evil" (Isa. 45:7)—or so that they would take him seriously. But Joseph is really asking a

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **5 Each his own dream.** Which came to them for Joseph's benefit, so that he could demonstrate his skill at dream interpretation and eventually get out of prison (Bekhor Shor).

6 He saw that they were distraught. They were sure their dreams were favorable; they said to each other, "Now there is nothing to prevent us from being released from prison! But how can we get word to the king?" (Hizkuni).

7 Why do you appear downcast today? More so than usual (Bekhor Shor).

8 There is no one to interpret them. Because we are in custody. If we weren't in custody, we could go ask the magicians and the sages (Bekhor Shor).

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NJPS [9]Then the chief cupbearer told his dream to Joseph. He said to him, "In my dream, there was a vine in front of me. [10]On the vine were three branches. It had barely budded, when out came its blossoms and its clusters ripened into grapes. [11]Pharaoh's cup was in my hand, and I took the grapes, pressed them into Pharaoh's cup, and placed the cup in Pharaoh's hand." [12]Joseph said to him, "This is its interpretation: The three branches are three days. [13]In three days Pharaoh will pardon you and restore you to your post; you will

9 וַיְסַפֵּר שַׂר־הַמַּשְׁקִים אֶת־חֲלֹמוֹ לְיוֹסֵף
וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ בַּחֲלוֹמִי וְהִנֵּה־גֶפֶן לְפָנָי׃
10 וּבַגֶּפֶן שְׁלֹשָׁה שָׂרִיגִם וְהִיא כְּפֹרַחַת
עָלְתָה נִצָּהּ הִבְשִׁילוּ אַשְׁכְּלֹתֶיהָ עֲנָבִים׃
11 וְכוֹס פַּרְעֹה בְּיָדִי וָאֶקַּח אֶת־הָעֲנָבִים
וָאֶשְׂחַט אֹתָם אֶל־כּוֹס פַּרְעֹה וָאֶתֵּן אֶת־
הַכּוֹס עַל־כַּף פַּרְעֹה׃ 12 וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ יוֹסֵף
זֶה פִּתְרֹנוֹ שְׁלֹשֶׁת הַשָּׂרִגִים שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים
הֵם׃ 13 בְּעוֹד | שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים יִשָּׂא פַרְעֹה
אֶת־רֹאשֶׁךָ וַהֲשִׁיבְךָ עַל־כַּנֶּךָ וְנָתַתָּ כוֹס־

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Who told Joseph that "the three branches" were "three days" (v. 12)? The same goes for all the rest of the details.

OJPS [9]And the chief butler told his dream to Joseph, and said to him: "In my dream, behold, a vine was before me; [10]and in the vine were three branches; and as it was budding, its blossoms shot forth, and the clusters thereof brought forth ripe grapes, [11]and Pharaoh's cup was in my hand; and I took the grapes, and pressed them into Pharaoh's cup, and I gave the cup into Pharaoh's hand." [12]And Joseph said unto him: "This is the interpretation of it: the three branches are three days; [13]within yet three days shall Pharaoh lift up thy head, and restore thee unto thine office; and

RASHI **10 It had barely budded**. Rather, "as if it had budded." It appeared to me in my dream that it had budded. After the bud, **out came its blossoms**, and then the new fruit—"After the budding, when the blossom has hardened into berries" (Isa. 18:5)—which **ripened into grapes**.

11 I . . . pressed them. The translation is that of Onkelos; the word is unique in the Bible but common in rabbinic Hebrew.

12 The three branches are three days. They symbolize three days. (There are many midrashim about this.)

13 In three days Pharaoh will pardon you. Rather, he will "count you." When he assigns his servants to serve before him at the banquet, you will be in that number. **Your post**. It is meant literally. He will restore you "to your station."

KIMHI **10 Ripened into grapes**. They are not called grapes until they ripen.

12 The three branches are three days. Joseph was smart enough to realize from the speed of the ripening that what the dream portended was due to happen quickly—a matter of days rather than months or years.

13 Pharaoh will pardon you. Literally, he will "lift up your head" (compare OJPS), which is downcast now because you are in prison.

NAHMANIDES question here (see OJPS), and Ibn Ezra's explanation does not explain that aspect of the verse. Perhaps the question is rhetorical: "Do not interpretations belong to God alone, not to human interpreters?" But I think NJPS understands correctly. "Doesn't God have an interpretation for every dream? And He can reveal the interpretation of your dreams too. If you don't understand them yourselves, tell them to me and perhaps God will be willing to reveal His secret to me."

10 It had barely budded. Rashi's comment is not correct; when describing what one "seems" to be seeing in a dream, one says "behold." The preposition *k-* in our phrase is not found either in the baker's dream or in Pharaoh's. Why would this "seem" like a bud more than anything else in any dream? All the other dreams are described in the standard way, using the expression "behold" to describe what "seemed" to be happening in the dreams. Our phrase, correctly understood, is using the preposition to mean "as," which is what it normally means: "just *as* it was budding, out came its blossoms." For similar examples, see "*when* Abram entered Egypt" (12:14); "*just then* he drew back his hand" (38:29); "*as* she lay dying" (1 Sam. 4:20); and many others. It was the speed with which the vine ripened that let Joseph know these things would come to pass in three days, not three months or three years. Either he just assumed that each man's head would be "lifted" on the same day, or he realized this because they had had their dreams on the same night. There is no need to assume, as Ibn Ezra does, that Joseph knew when Pharaoh's birthday was.

RASHBAM **10 It had barely budded, when out came its blossoms**. This is the normal sequence: "it had brought forth sprouts, produced blossoms, and borne almonds" (Num. 17:23).

13 In three days Pharaoh will pardon you. Rather, "he will *count* you" once again among his servants; see Num. 1:2, where the phrase is used to mean "take a

IBN EZRA **10 Out came its blossoms**. For the unusual noun, compare the verb in "the pomegranates *are in bloom*" (Song 7:13). **Its clusters ripened into grapes**. Again, for the verb, compare "the crop *is ripe*" (Joel 4:13)—though that is Qal and ours is Hiphil. **[H]**

11 Pressed them. Despite what Saadia says, this is the same verb as "to slaughter." **[I]**

12 This is its interpretation. We do not find this word occurring in any other context than with dreams. **The three branches are three days**. Some wonder how Joseph knew the three branches were three days and not three months or three years. Well, Pharaoh's birthday was coming up! (See my comment to v. 20.) But conceivably the queen was pregnant and Joseph knew that the birth of the *future* Pharaoh was imminent (though I think this less plausible).

13 Pharaoh will pardon you. V. 20 demonstrates that the "counting" explanation for this idiom is the correct one; see my

[H] See Special Topics, "Biblical Hebrew." **[I]** Saadia reads the שׂ as if it were ס; Ibn Ezra reads it as if it were שׁ.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **9 Then the chief cupbearer told his dream to Joseph**. He outranked the other man, which is why he told his dream first and why he is mentioned first (Abarbanel).

11 I took the grapes, pressed them into Pharaoh's cup. Grapes would never be pressed directly into anyone's cup, least of all Pharaoh's; he pressed them with the intent that the drink would be poured into Pharaoh's cup. And of course compressing the expression points to the speed of these events in the dream (Gersonides).

12 The three branches are three days. He realized that the same thing could have happened on a single branch, so three must have some special significance. It would have been unreasonable for Pharaoh to wait three years or even three months to judge these two. When Joseph remembered that Pharaoh's birthday was in three days, he knew that there would be a celebration and that all the advisers would be there, giving Pharaoh the opportunity to handle this matter. Dream interpretation is like a puzzle or a riddle, and the interpreter must think about an interpretation that would be plausible. Learning without logic is worthless (Bekhor Shor). The cupbearer assumed that the three branches meant three possible punishments: he would either be killed, exiled, or at the very least lose his job (Abarbanel).

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NJPS place Pharaoh's cup in his hand, as was your custom formerly when you were his cupbearer. 14But think of me when all is well with you again, and do me the kindness of mentioning me to Pharaoh, so as to free me from this place. 15For in truth, I was kidnapped from the land of the Hebrews; nor have I done anything here that they should have put me in the dungeon."

16When the chief baker saw how favorably he had interpreted, he said to Joseph,

OJPS thou shalt give Pharaoh's cup into his hand, after the former manner when thou wast his butler. 14But have me in thy remembrance when it shall be well with thee, and show kindness, I pray thee, unto me, and make mention of me unto Pharaoh, and bring me out of this house. 15For indeed I was stolen away out of the land of the Hebrews; and here also have I done nothing that they should put me into the dungeon."

16When the chief baker saw that the interpretation was good, he said unto Joseph:

פַּרְעֹה בְּיָדוֹ כַּמִּשְׁפָּט הָרִאשׁוֹן אֲשֶׁר הָיִיתָ מַשְׁקֵהוּ׃ 14 כִּי אִם־זְכַרְתַּנִי אִתְּךָ כַּאֲשֶׁר יִיטַב לָךְ וְעָשִׂיתָ־נָּא עִמָּדִי חֶסֶד וְהִזְכַּרְתַּנִי אֶל־פַּרְעֹה וְהוֹצֵאתַנִי מִן־הַבַּיִת הַזֶּה׃ 15 כִּי־גָנֹב גֻּנַּבְתִּי מֵאֶרֶץ הָעִבְרִים וְגַם־פֹּה לֹא־עָשִׂיתִי מְאוּמָה כִּי־שָׂמוּ אֹתִי בַּבּוֹר׃ 16 וַיַּרְא שַׂר־הָאֹפִים כִּי טוֹב פָּתָר וַיֹּאמֶר

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why does Joseph say "*think* of me" and then repeat, using the same Hebrew verb, "do me the kindness of *mentioning* me" (v. 14)? ✦ What is the implication of his saying, "*nor* have I done anything" (v. 15)?

RASHI **14 But think of me when all is well with you again.** As I have predicted. **Do me the kindness.** *Please* do me the kindness (see "I pray thee" of OJPS).

16 Openwork baskets. "Hole" baskets, that is, wicker ones, loosely woven, leaving

KIMHI **14 But think of me when all is well with you again.** When you have once again risen to high position. Remember that I gave you the good news by interpreting your dream and lifted your spirits when you were feeling low. One good turn deserves another. **Do me the kindness of mentioning me to Pharaoh, so as to free me from this place.** This goes beyond what you owe me. But you are an important person in his household, and he will believe you when you tell him that I do not deserve to be here.

15 I was kidnapped from the land of the Hebrews. From my father's home in the land of the Hebrews. — Everyone knew that "the Hebrews" were the Patriarchs, and that they lived in the land of Canaan. That is why Joseph mentioned "the land of the Hebrews."

16 When the chief baker saw how favorably he had interpreted. He "saw" in his heart that what his ears had heard was favorable. He thought Joseph would interpret

NAHMANIDES **14 But think of me when all is well with you again.** Rather, "And *if you would*, remember me *with you* when all is well with you again." By "with you," Joseph means "let me share your good fortune with you" by getting me out of prison too, or perhaps "remember me as if I were actually with you." **Do me the kindness of mentioning me to Pharaoh.** More precisely, "Do me the kindness, *I pray thee*" (see OJPS), or perhaps "Now, do me the kindness." He wanted him to say something like "There is a wonderful servant in the chief steward's house, one who could 'attend upon kings' [Prov. 22:29]." I wonder whether Joseph might be hoping the man would ask Pharaoh to let him have Joseph as his own servant. But our phrase might even mean, "do me the kindness of *reminding* Pharaoh about me. He saw all the responsibility I was given in Potiphar's house, and will surely free me if you remind him about me. A king can do anything he wants." **So as to free me from this place.** Those who are keeping me here are making a big mistake.

15 From the land of the Hebrews. From Hebron, where Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob lived. For Abraham, the original ancestor of the group, was called "Abram the Hebrew" (14:13). He had been brought from across (*eber*) the great river and his name was "honored among the nations" (Mal. 1:11), in fulfillment of "I will make of you a great nation" (12:2), so all his descendants bore the name "Hebrew" (*ibri*). They retained that name, making sure not to intermingle with the Canaanites of those lands, and the name has stuck with all the descendants of Israel ever since. Potiphar's wife said, "He had to bring us a Hebrew" (39:14), because Joseph had told them he was a Hebrew. He did not want to be taken for a Canaanite. He calls it "the land of the Hebrews" here in the sense of "the land where the Hebrews live," or perhaps it already went by that name because the Hebrews were the most prominent leaders: "you are the elect of God among us" (23:6). Indeed, the Holy One reproved the kings of Canaan on their account: "Do not touch My anointed ones; do not harm My prophets" (Ps. 105:15).

16 When the chief baker saw how favorably he had interpreted. In saying that the interpretation was "good," OJPS follows Onkelos, who takes the meaning from such verses as "the divine beings saw how *beautiful* the daughters of men were" (6:2) and "teach me *good* sense and knowledge" (Ps. 119:66). This man did not really think Joseph knew anything about dream interpretation, and would

RASHBAM census." **And restore you to your post.** He will "count" you among them again in order "to restore you"—which indeed Pharaoh does in vv. 20–21. Our form is an infinitive, "to" restore. Note the different vowel under the ה in "the LORD *will send you back* to Egypt" (Deut. 28:68).

14 Think of me. Joseph is saying, "I am so certain you will return to Pharaoh's favor that I know that if you think of me you will be able to get me out of here. Unlike the others imprisoned here, I am innocent."

15 I was kidnapped from the land of the Hebrews. So it is unjust that I have been enslaved. **Nor have I done anything here that they should have put me in the dungeon.** I am no more deserving of being in the dungeon than I was of being enslaved.

16 How favorably he had interpreted. Rather, how "well" he had interpreted. For truth is obvious. **Openwork baskets.** For "openwork," compare "*holes* in

IBN EZRA comment to Exod. 30:12. **Your post.** Literally to your original "position" or "location"; see Zech. 5:11 and 2 Chron. 24:13 for other forms of this word. The word may be the same as the "stand" used in the Tabernacle (e.g., Exod. 30:18); Dan. 11:20 certainly uses that word in a way similar to our verse.

15 From the land of the Hebrews. See my comment to "a Hebrew slave" in Exod. 21:2.

16 In my dream. As OJPS demonstrates, dreams are always described in the Bible using the word "behold," inviting the

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **14 But think of me when all is well with you again.** And do me a kindness by sending me some money or something of the kind (Abarbanel).

15 I was kidnapped from the land of the Hebrews. Having admitted that he was a Hebrew, Joseph was rewarded by being buried back in his homeland. But Moses, who let Jethro's daughters think he was "an Egyptian" (Exod. 2:19), did not earn the privilege of being buried in his homeland (Hizkuni). The Hebrews and the Egyptians were allied at this period (Abarbanel).

16 When the chief baker saw how favorably he had interpreted. He knew that someone who was trying to deceive them would have set a much later time for his words to be fulfilled (Hizkuni).

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NJPS "In my dream, similarly, there were three openwork baskets on my head. [17]In the uppermost basket were all kinds of food for Pharaoh that a baker prepares; and the birds were eating it out of the basket above my head." [18]Joseph answered, "This is its interpretation: The three baskets are three days. [19]In three days Pharaoh will lift off your head and impale you upon a pole; and the birds will pick off your flesh."

[20]On the third day—his birthday—Pharaoh made a banquet for all his officials, and he singled out his chief cupbearer and his chief baker from among his officials. [21]He restored the chief cupbearer to his cupbearing, and he placed the cup in Pharaoh's hand; [22]but the chief baker he impaled—just as Joseph had interpreted to them.

OJPS "I also saw in my dream, and, behold, three baskets of white bread were on my head; [17]and in the uppermost basket there was of all manner of baked food for Pharaoh; and the birds did eat them out of the basket upon my head." [18]And Joseph answered and said: "This is the interpretation thereof: the three baskets are three days; [19]within yet three days shall Pharaoh lift up thy head from off thee, and shall hang thee on a tree; and the birds shall eat thy flesh from off thee."

[20]And it came to pass the third day, which was Pharaoh's birthday, that he made a feast unto all his servants; and he lifted up the head of the chief butler and the head of the chief baker among his servants. [21]And he restored the chief butler back unto his butlership; and he gave the cup into Pharaoh's hand. [22]But he hanged the chief baker, as Joseph had interpreted to them.

אֶל־יוֹסֵף אַף־אֲנִי֙ בַּחֲלוֹמִ֔י וְהִנֵּ֥ה שְׁלֹשָׁ֖ה
סַלֵּ֣י חֹרִ֑י עַל־רֹאשִׁ֔י׃ 17 וּבַסַּ֤ל הָעֶלְיוֹן֙ מִכֹּ֣ל
מַאֲכַ֣ל פַּרְעֹ֔ה מַעֲשֵׂ֖ה אֹפֶ֑ה וְהָע֗וֹף אֹכֵ֤ל
אֹתָם֙ מִן־הַסַּ֔ל מֵעַ֖ל רֹאשִׁ֑י׃ 18 וַיַּ֥עַן יוֹסֵ֖ף
וַיֹּ֣אמֶר זֶ֔ה פִּתְרֹנ֑וֹ שְׁלֹ֣שֶׁת הַסַּלִּ֔ים שְׁלֹ֥שֶׁת
יָמִ֖ים הֵֽם׃ 19 בְּע֣וֹד ׀ שְׁלֹ֣שֶׁת יָמִ֗ים יִשָּׂ֤א
פַרְעֹה֙ אֶת־רֹאשְׁךָ֔ מֵֽעָלֶ֑יךָ וְתָלָ֤ה אוֹתְךָ֙
עַל־עֵ֔ץ וְאָכַ֥ל הָע֛וֹף אֶת־בְּשָׂרְךָ֖ מֵעָלֶֽיךָ׃
20 וַיְהִ֞י ׀ בַּיּ֣וֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁ֗י יוֹם֙ הֻלֶּ֣דֶת אֶת־
פַּרְעֹ֔ה וַיַּ֥עַשׂ מִשְׁתֶּ֖ה לְכָל־עֲבָדָ֑יו וַיִּשָּׂ֞א
אֶת־רֹ֣אשׁ ׀ שַׂ֣ר הַמַּשְׁקִ֗ים וְאֶת־רֹ֛אשׁ שַׂ֥ר
הָאֹפִ֖ים בְּתוֹךְ֥ עֲבָדָֽיו׃ 21 וַיָּ֣שֶׁב אֶת־שַׂ֣ר
הַמַּשְׁקִ֔ים עַל־מַשְׁקֵ֖הוּ וַיִּתֵּ֣ן הַכּ֑וֹס עַל־כַּ֖ף
פַּרְעֹֽה׃ 22 וְאֶת֙ שַׂ֣ר הָאֹפִ֔ים תָּלָ֖ה כַּאֲשֶׁ֣ר
פָּתַ֣ר לָהֶ֑ם יוֹסֵֽף׃

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ How could Joseph know that, of two such almost exactly similar dreams, one foretold life and honor and the other that "Pharaoh will lift off your head and impale you upon a pole" (v. 19)?

RASHI holes everywhere. There are many of these in our locality, and bread vendors regularly use them.

20 His birthday. The Hebrew word is actually a passive infinitive: "the day of his being birthed." See Ezek. 16:4, the only other place in the Bible where this expression occurs, though there it refers to the actual day of birth. The passive is used because being born is an activity that is done to the infant by others, the mother and the midwife (who is called a "birther" in Hebrew). **He singled out his chief cupbearer and his chief baker from among his officials.** The expression used here is the same one used in v. 13. He enumerated those who were serving him at the banquet and remembered these two when he did so. It literally refers to counting, as in "*Take a census* of the whole Israelite community" (Num. 1:2).

KIMHI his dream the same way. And people think that dreams follow their interpretation. But Joseph interpreted each dream as he understood it, whether good or bad.

18 The three baskets are three days. The action of this dream was also quick. But unlike the wine that was poured out for Pharaoh in the cupbearer's dream, here the food did not go to Pharaoh. So Joseph realized that Pharaoh would not restore him to his post but would have him killed.

19 The birds will pick off your flesh. As they ate the food out of the basket.

NAHMANIDES not have told Joseph his own dream if he had not seen how competently and logically Joseph had interpreted his colleague's dream. But it may well mean that he was relieved to hear a "favorable" interpretation. Then the baker told Joseph his own dream, having been even more worried about it than the other man had been about his. **Openwork baskets.** See Rashi's comment. But Saadia's explanation **[G]** is the correct one; it is "white bread." Compare "no longer shall his face grow *pale*" (Isa. 29:22). This is the Aramaic word for "white." The baskets were filled with white bread, and on top of the uppermost basket were all kinds of delicious things of the kind made by a pastry chef. The Palestinian Talmud, commenting on M. Bez. 2:6 (which uses this word), clearly identifies it as bread.

[G] See Ibn Ezra's comment.

RASHBAM the ground" (Job 30:6). That is how the birds could eat the food out of the basket—through the loose weave of the holes.

19 Pharaoh will lift off your head. Literally. He will not "lift *up* your head" as in the idiom of counting used in v. 13. The only way your head is going "up" is when you are hanged.

IBN EZRA listener to picture the dream as if it were right in front of him. **Openwork baskets.** According to Saadia, these are really "baskets of white bread"; he bases this on the use of the word in Neh. 6:17 to mean "noble."

19 In three days. More precisely, "within yet three days" (OJPS). It is not a precise time but a time *limit*. **Pharaoh will lift off your head.** As the translations understand, this time the meaning is not merely that Pharaoh will lift it "up" but that he will literally lift it "off," that is, cut it off, or perhaps lift it up on a pike.

20 His birthday. The anniversary of the day on which he was born. Kings today often celebrate their birthdays by summoning all their officials and giving them gifts. (The Hebrew word is technically a Hophal infinitive.)

21 To his cupbearing. Here the word is a noun; precisely the same Hebrew word is a verb in v. 13.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **20 His birthday.** The Hebrew form is found also only in Ezek. 16:4–5 (Masorah).

21 He restored the chief cupbearer to his cupbearing. There was no way he could keep a fly from landing in the king's wine (Hizkuni).

22 But the chief baker he impaled. Since he ought to have sifted the flour (Hizkuni).

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NJPS 23Yet the chief cupbearer did not think of Joseph; he forgot him.

OJPS 23Yet did not the chief butler remember Joseph, but forgot him.

23 וְלֹא־זָכַר שַׂר־הַמַּשְׁקִים אֶת־יוֹסֵף
וַיִּשְׁכָּחֵהוּ׃ פ

RASHI **23 Yet the chief cupbearer did not think of Joseph.** On that particular day. **He forgot him.** Afterward. Having counted on this man to remember him, Joseph was forced to remain in prison for an extra year. **[N]** As the Psalmist says, "Happy is the man who makes the LORD his trust, who turns not to the arrogant" (Ps. 40:5)—the "arrogant" being the Egyptians.

[N] Some texts of Rashi's comment say "two more years."

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **23 Yet the chief cupbearer did not think of Joseph; he forgot him.** The reason he did not "remember" Joseph to Pharaoh was not that he was hateful or evil; it just slipped his mind (Bekhor Shor). He did not think of sending Joseph anything, as he had asked; nor did he remember to mention Joseph to Pharaoh (Abarbanel).

RASHBAM **23 Yet the chief cupbearer did not think of Joseph.** When he got out of prison, as Joseph had asked. **He forgot him.** For a long time afterward, until the Holy One arranged miracles for Joseph so that he was forced to remember him.

IBN EZRA **23 Yet the chief cupbearer did not think of Joseph.** Rather, he did not "remember" him (OJPS) to Pharaoh; he did not mention him. Compare "do not mention 'the burden of the LORD' any more" (Jer. 23:36). **He forgot him.** He literally did not remember him, mentally.

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MIKKETS

מקץ

NJPS 41 After two years' time, Pharaoh dreamed that he was standing by the Nile, 2when out of the Nile there came up seven cows, handsome and sturdy, and

OJPS 41 And it came to pass at the end of two full years, that Pharaoh dreamed: and, behold, he stood by the river. 2And, behold, there came up out of the river seven kine, well-favored and fat-fleshed;

מא

וַיְהִי מִקֵּץ שְׁנָתַיִם יָמִים
וּפַרְעֹה חֹלֵם וְהִנֵּה עֹמֵד עַל־הַיְאֹר׃
2 וְהִנֵּה מִן־הַיְאֹר עֹלֹת שֶׁבַע פָּרוֹת יְפוֹת

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Was Pharaoh's own imagination the source of his dreams (v. 1), or were they divine? ✦ If divine, did they stem from the Active Intellect or from the heavenly bodies? ✦ Is dream interpretation the result of a thought process, of prophecy, or is it just random?

RASHI 41:1 After two years' time. More precisely, as Onkelos explains, "at the end of two full years" (OJPS). **By the Nile.** Literally, "by the river" (OJPS), but using a special word for river that applies only to the Nile, meaning something like "the Branch." For the entire country had man-made branches; when the Nile rose, it would fill them and water the country. It rains in Egypt only rarely compared to other countries.

2 Handsome. This was symbolic of the years of plenty because when people have enough to eat they not only look good to each other, they treat each other handsomely. **In the reed grass.** That is, "in the marsh"; compare Job 8:11.

KIMHI 41:1 After two years' time. Two years after the "banquet" of 40:20. **Pharaoh dreamed.** The Holy One, deservedly "held in awe by men for His acts" (Ps. 66:5), arranged step by step for our ancestors to go down to Egypt. They were treated with great respect when they arrived there, and continued to be treated with great respect for a century, until Joseph died. But then their transgressions brought on the time of enslavement. This dream was a kind of prophetic vision from the Holy One; as the Psalmist says, "He called down a famine on the land" (Ps. 105:16).

2 When out of the Nile there came up seven cows. In Egypt, of course, it is the Nile itself that "comes up" and waters the land.

NAHMANIDES 41:1 The Nile. See Rashi's comment. But Onkelos here uses the ordinary word for "river." He does use a different word in "the waters of Egypt—its rivers, its *canals*, its ponds, all its bodies of water" (Exod. 7:19), but that is because the regular word for "river" has already occurred in that verse. From Onkelos's perspective, all the water in that verse would be in "branches," the larger ones being called "rivers" and "canals." Thus our word *ye'or* can be either a natural river or a long, straight "canal" that has been dug by human hands. We do find *ye'or* used for the Tigris, since Daniel is standing on the bank of the Tigris in Dan. 10:4 and refers to it as "the *ye'or*" three times in Dan. 12:5–6. I think Onkelos is correct to take it as simply another word for "river." It is interesting that both *nahar* and *ye'or* are words that have to do with light; Onkelos (like R. Johanan in Genesis Rabbah) thinks "light" in Job 36:30 and 37:11 refers to rain. Perhaps that is because the rains are caused by the sun and moon. Since the rivers are made of rain, they can be associated with the lights that are their original cause.

2 When out of the Nile there came up seven cows. They came up out of the Nile because that is where Egypt gets its water, determining whether they are to have abundance or famine. The cows in the dream represent plowing and the "ears of grain" (v. 5) the yield of the harvest: "there are still five years to come in which there shall be neither *plowing* nor *harvest*" (45:6; see OJPS). He saw that the Nile would rise but little, meaning that there would be no plowing. As for what they would sow in the few moist places, "a blast, a wind of the LORD" (Hosea 13:15) would burn them up, just as he saw them: "scorched by the east wind" (v. 6). The dream implies that the abundance would be in Egypt alone (see vv. 29 and 48), but after that "will come seven years of famine" (v. 30), where he pointedly does not mention Egypt. So the surrounding lands would not have an opportunity to store any food, even if they heard about the prediction, which must have become quite well known. **And they grazed in the reed grass.** That is, in Egypt; but when "the ugly gaunt cows ate up the seven handsome sturdy cows" (v. 4), this is not mentioned. They went all over the earth; Pharaoh had no idea where they had gone. "Reed grass" is indeed the correct translation, by the way, as the very text cited by Rashi shows: "Can papyrus thrive without marsh? Can *rushes* grow without water? While still tender, not yet plucked, they would wither before any other grass" (Job 8:11–12). Perhaps he meant that it was "marsh grass" and that grazing "in the marsh" is essentially the same thing as grazing "in the

RASHBAM 41:1 After two years' time. More precisely, "two *full* years" (OJPS); see Lev. 25:29–30 for the Hebrew usage that confirms the usage of "days" (as the Hebrew literally says) to indicate a complete year. It has the same meaning in 24:55. So too with Passover we find the commandment "You shall keep this institution at its set time from year to year" (Exod. 13:10) using the expression to indicate a time period of one full year. But if our verse had said "two years" rather than "two years of days," it would have meant "after a year and a day." For the Hebrew of such phrases as "a lamb in its first year" (e.g., Lev. 12:6) demonstrates that any part of a year would fit the definition of a second year.

2 Out of the Nile there came up seven cows. Normally cows all drink together and then come back up to graze. **In the reed grass.** The translations are correct; see "Can *rushes* grow without water?" (Job 8:11).

IBN EZRA 41:1 After two years' time. Literally, "at the end of two full years" (OJPS)—but we have not been told when they are counting from! The same is true for "after a period of forty years had gone by" (2 Sam. 15:7) and "in another sixty-five years" (Isa. 7:8) and "in the thirtieth year" (Ezek. 1:1). In our case, the beginning of the two years may have been the day the chief cupbearer got out of prison, or the day that Joseph *went* to prison. As for "days" meaning a year, see my comments to 4:3 and 27:44. **Pharaoh dreamed.** Rather, "Pharaoh was dreaming." Compare the grammar of "Rebekah *had been listening*" (27:5).

2 In the reed grass. Some think the Hebrew word does indeed refer to a plant, in which case they were grazing *on* the reed grass; compare the two halves of Lam. 3:15 and you will see that *b-* could be superfluous here. Others think the Hebrew word refers to

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS 41:1 After two years' time. Since Joseph was 17 when he was sold and 30 now, and had spent a year in Potiphar's house, he must have been imprisoned for 12 years (Hizkuni). **Pharaoh dreamed.** If there was no warning of the famine, many people would die. The Holy One decreed that they be saved by Pharaoh. For such is His mercy that He hands His people over only to a nation that He has first made great. He did the same with Nebuchadnezzar and again with the Romans (Bekhor Shor). Even a prophetic dream cannot occur unless the person is already dreaming (Sforno).

2 Out of the Nile there came up seven cows. Where they had gone to drink or to cool off (Bekhor Shor).

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NJPS they grazed in the reed grass. 3But presently, seven other cows came up from the Nile close behind them, ugly and gaunt, and stood beside the cows on the bank of the Nile; 4and the ugly gaunt cows ate up the seven handsome sturdy cows. And Pharaoh awoke.

5He fell asleep and dreamed a second time: Seven ears of grain, solid and healthy, grew on a single stalk. 6But close behind them sprouted seven ears, thin and scorched by the east wind. 7And the thin ears swallowed up the seven solid and full ears. Then Pharaoh awoke: it was a dream!

מַרְאֵה וּבְרִיאֹת בָּשָׂר וַתִּרְעֶינָה בָּאָחוּ׃
3 וְהִנֵּה שֶׁבַע פָּרוֹת אֲחֵרוֹת עֹלוֹת אַחֲרֵיהֶן
מִן־הַיְאֹר רָעוֹת מַרְאֶה וְדַקּוֹת בָּשָׂר
וַתַּעֲמֹדְנָה אֵצֶל הַפָּרוֹת עַל־שְׂפַת הַיְאֹר׃
4 וַתֹּאכַלְנָה הַפָּרוֹת רָעוֹת הַמַּרְאֶה וְדַקֹּת
הַבָּשָׂר אֵת שֶׁבַע הַפָּרוֹת יְפֹת הַמַּרְאֶה
וְהַבְּרִיאֹת וַיִּיקַץ פַּרְעֹה׃
5 וַיִּישָׁן וַיַּחֲלֹם שֵׁנִית וְהִנֵּה | שֶׁבַע שִׁבֳּלִים
עֹלוֹת בְּקָנֶה אֶחָד בְּרִיאוֹת וְטֹבוֹת׃ 6 וְהִנֵּה
שֶׁבַע שִׁבֳּלִים דַּקּוֹת וּשְׁדוּפֹת קָדִים
צֹמְחוֹת אַחֲרֵיהֶן׃ 7 וַתִּבְלַעְנָה הַשִּׁבֳּלִים
הַדַּקּוֹת אֵת שֶׁבַע הַשִּׁבֳּלִים הַבְּרִיאוֹת
וְהַמְּלֵאוֹת וַיִּיקַץ פַּרְעֹה וְהִנֵּה חֲלוֹם׃

OJPS and they fed in the reed-grass. 3And, behold, seven other kine came up after them out of the river, ill favored and lean-fleshed; and stood by the other kine upon the brink of the river. 4And the ill-favored and lean-fleshed kine did eat up the seven well-favored and fat kine. So Pharaoh awoke.

5And he slept and dreamed a second time: and, behold, seven ears of corn came up upon one stalk, rank and good. 6And, behold, seven ears, thin and blasted with the east wind, sprung up after them. 7And the thin ears swallowed up the seven rank and full ears. And Pharaoh awoke, and, behold, it was a dream.

RASHI **4 The ugly gaunt cows ate up the seven handsome sturdy cows.** All the joy of the years of plenty would be forgotten during the famine.

6 Scorched. That is, "parched." But Onkelos explains it as "blasted" (OJPS) or "beaten," using a word related to the "lintel" of a door, which is constantly being knocked by the door. **By the east wind.** This is a dry, southeast wind.

7 It was a dream! One complete dream was over and ready for the interpreters.

RASHBAM **4 And Pharaoh awoke.** After his first, brief sleep, at which point one's dream normally changes to some other topic, though the sleeper himself does not even realize that he is dreaming.

5 Seven ears of grain, solid and healthy, grew on a single stalk. For seven ears to grow from a single seed was a sign of abundance.

7 Then Pharaoh awoke. Now fully awake, he could realize that he had been dreaming. **It was a dream!** As in "When morning came, there was Leah!" (29:25),

KIMHI **7 Then Pharaoh awoke: it was a dream!** Pharaoh woke between the two dreams so that the second would not seem to carry the first one any further. A second, separate dream in one and the same night would not add meaning; it would indicate how

NAHMANIDES marsh grass." The Hebrew word is certainly a collective noun for the grasses that grow by the banks of rivers and ponds. The preposition "in" is being used here as in "Come, eat *of* my food and drink *of* the wine that I have mixed" (Prov. 9:5). And indeed they were grazing "on the bank of the Nile" (v. 3), not in a marsh. It may be that this word *aḥu* has something to do with *aḥvah* ("brotherhood"), given that such marshes are made up of many different grasses that all grow together.

3 And stood beside the cows. Their standing right next to them was symbolic of the fact that there would be no break between the seven good years and the seven years of famine. (See v. 5 for a similar detail.) Pharaoh does not repeat this detail to Joseph, but perhaps the text is not concerned with making both versions match, as when he tells the story and adds that "when they had consumed them, one could not tell that they had consumed them" (v. 21).

4 The ugly gaunt cows ate up the seven handsome sturdy cows. This, in my view, symbolizes that the seven years of famine would "eat up" the seven good years. This is what prompted Joseph to tell Pharaoh to "let all the food of these good years that are coming be gathered . . . [as] a reserve for the land for the seven years of famine" (vv. 35–36). He recognized that the fat cows and the good ears would disappear inside the bad ones. That is, he was not giving advice—had he been appointed adviser to the king?—but simply interpreting the dream. So too "all the abundance in the land of Egypt will be forgotten" (v. 30) and "no trace of the abundance will be left" (v. 31) are interpreting "one could not tell that they had consumed them" (v. 21). The scrawny cows did not get fat after eating the fat cows; they merely survived. Had they not eaten them, they would have died. So it is not, as Rashi thinks, that swallowing the cows means that the joy of the years of plenty would be "forgotten."

5 Grew on a single stalk. Like the cows that "stood beside" the other cows (v. 3), this is a sign that the seven years of plenty would occur one after the other, seven years in a row.

6 Close behind them sprouted seven ears. It is not that he watched them sprout; he saw them fully formed. The verb is simply implying that he saw them immediately after he saw the others. Everything in these dreams happened with no delay.

7 Then Pharaoh awoke: it was a dream! See Rashi's comment; in my view, however, the text is telling us that Pharaoh remained in bed, awake and thinking about his dream, wondering if perhaps he would dream a third time. But when he woke in the morning without

IBN EZRA a low spot where plants flourish. Whichever it means, the plural in "though he flourish among *reeds*" (Hosea 13:15) is its brother from the same mother: *aḥim* there is not "brothers" but the plural of our *aḥu*.

5 Seven ears of grain. Notice that the "ears" end in *–im*, which makes them look masculine even though they are really feminine—just like the words for "women" and "concubines."

6 Scorched. Rather, "bloated"; "blight" (from this same root) is mentioned in Deut. 28:22. **By the east wind.** The east is the "front" in Hebrew because that is where the sun first rises.

7 Solid and full. The two words mean essentially the same thing.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **3 And stood beside the cows on the bank of the Nile.** They did not eat them up immediately, just as the famine did not immediately consume all the grain of the seven years of plenty (Bekhor Shor). The famine and the plenty overlapped for a short period; see v. 54 (Sforno).

4 And Pharaoh awoke. So that he would think about the dream and not forget any of the details, as he would have if he had not woken up in between the two dreams (Bekhor Shor).

7 And the thin ears swallowed up the seven solid and full ears. That is, they grew over them and covered them. A plant cannot "swallow" another plant, and it is not usual to show a person something in a dream that cannot really happen (Bekhor Shor). **Then Pharaoh awoke: it was a dream!** It seems to me that both dreams were necessary to understand the interpretation correctly. For example, if

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NJPS 8Next morning, his spirit was agitated, and he sent for all the magicians of Egypt, and all its wise men; and Pharaoh told them his dreams, but none could interpret them for Pharaoh.

9The chief cupbearer then spoke up and said to Pharaoh, "I must make mention today of my offenses. 10Once Pharaoh was angry with his servants, and placed me in custody in the house of the chief steward,

8 וַיְהִי בַבֹּקֶר וַתִּפָּעֶם רוּחוֹ וַיִּשְׁלַח וַיִּקְרָא
אֶת־כָּל־חַרְטֻמֵּי מִצְרַיִם וְאֶת־כָּל־חֲכָמֶיהָ
וַיְסַפֵּר פַּרְעֹה לָהֶם אֶת־חֲלֹמוֹ וְאֵין־פּוֹתֵר
אוֹתָם לְפַרְעֹה׃
9 וַיְדַבֵּר שַׂר הַמַּשְׁקִים אֶת־פַּרְעֹה לֵאמֹר
אֶת־חֲטָאַי אֲנִי מַזְכִּיר הַיּוֹם׃ 10 פַּרְעֹה
קָצַף עַל־עֲבָדָיו וַיִּתֵּן אֹתִי בְּמִשְׁמַר בֵּית

OJPS 8And it came to pass in the morning that his spirit was troubled; and he sent and called for all the magicians of Egypt, and all the wise men thereof; and Pharaoh told them his dream; but there was none that could interpret them unto Pharaoh.

9Then spoke the chief butler unto Pharaoh, saying: "I make mention of my faults this day: 10Pharaoh was wroth with his servants, and put me in the ward of the house of the captain of the guard, me and

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why did the chief cupbearer make mention of his "offenses" (v. 9) when he had committed only one? ✦ Why does he repeat "me" (v. 10) a second time (see OJPS)?

RASHI **8 His spirit was agitated.** Literally, it was "pounding" inside him like a bell. In Daniel 2, the same thing happens to Nebuchadnezzar. But there the verb is Hitpael, because he had agitated himself twice as much, so he could not even remember the dream: "Nebuchadnezzar had a dream; *his spirit was agitated*" (Dan. 2:1). **The magicians.** The word *ḥartum* is an acronym for *neḥarim be-timei*, those who inquire **[A]** with the bones of the dead; *tamia* means "bone" in Aramaic. They were osteomancers. **But none could interpret them for Pharaoh.** They could interpret them all right—but not "for Pharaoh." His ears were closed. He would not accept their interpretation: "You are going to father seven daughters—and you will bury seven daughters."

[A] Precisely what Rashi means by this word is obscure.

KIMHI soon the matter would play out. But at this point, he was through dreaming for the night.

8 His spirit was agitated. From worry—he had had two dreams that seemed to mean the same thing. **But none could interpret them for Pharaoh.** Rather, "none [of] them could interpret." Compare "when they were gone out [of] the city" (OJPS; see the Hebrew). Actually, the interpretation of the dream is obvious. But the wisdom of the Egyptian sages vanished so that Joseph could interpret it and rise to greatness. Says the Holy One, It is I "who turn sages back and make nonsense of their knowledge" (Isa. 44:25).

9 I must make mention today of my offenses. It is not proper to remind the king of one's offenses once they have been forgiven—but I must do so today for the king's own sake.

10 Together with the chief baker. The Hebrew text repeats "me" before this phrase for clarity because of the long phrase following the first "me." You will find a similar

NAHMANIDES having dreamed again, "his spirit was agitated" (v. 8). Contrast Nebuchadnezzar, whose "spirit was agitated, yet he was overcome by sleep" (Dan. 2:1)—he was already agitated during the night. The waking here is of the nature described in *The Book of Sleep*. **[A]** When one dream is followed by an unrelated dream, it does not come to pass. Here, though, Pharaoh did remember his dream when he woke, wondering if the same dream would be repeated a third time as it already had been a second time. That is, Pharaoh himself realized that the two dreams he had had were "a [single] dream." He uses the same language when speaking to Joseph: "I have had *a dream*, but no one can interpret *it*" (v. 15). He does not say, "I have had some dreams, but no one can interpret them." The same applies in v. 22, where NJPS translates "in my other dream," but Pharaoh himself says merely "in my dream" (OJPS).

8 None could interpret them for Pharaoh. No one could interpret either one of the two dreams, which from Pharaoh's own (correct) perspective were but a single dream.

[A] This book is unknown to us.

RASHBAM "behold" (OJPS) marks a sudden realization. Up to that point, he assumed what he was experiencing was real.

8 His spirit was agitated. His mind was unsettled and he was full of trepidation. He determined to look into the dream and have it interpreted. The same expression is used in the book of Daniel: "I have had a dream and *I am full of anxiety* to know what I have dreamed" (Dan. 2:3). **But none could interpret them for Pharaoh.** None could interpret them in a way that made sense to Pharaoh.

10 Pharaoh was angry with his servants. "Pharaoh" is simply the Egyptian

IBN EZRA **8 His spirit was agitated.** Compare "I am *overwrought*" (Ps. 77:5). Some relate both these cases to "him who *pounds the anvil*" of Isa. 41:7; in our case, the sense would be that his spirit had been (as it were) "beaten." **The magicians.** Either the word has four consonants rather than the usual three, or it could be Aramaic or Egyptian. These were the scientists. **All its wise men.** Those who were wise in astrology and dream interpretation.

9 I must make mention today of my offenses. I have something I must say to Pharaoh, even though it means I must make mention today of my offenses.

10 Pharaoh. I do not think Pharaoh is a name, but a regular Egyptian noun, like

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS he had just dreamed about the cows, he might have thought that after seven years (or for seven months) a weaker nation would overpower his own great nation. Cows, after all, symbolize nations in a verse like Amos 4:1, "Hear this word, you cows of Bashan," and Egypt itself in Jer. 46:20, "Egypt is a handsome heifer" (Bekhor Shor). It must have been a dream, since plants cannot swallow other plants. But animals do sometimes eat other animals, so after the first dream it does not say, "It was a dream!" (Hizkuni). Pharaoh realized that he had been standing in the same place in both dreams (Sforno). **But none could interpret them.** Because they thought it was two separate dreams (Sforno).

8 His spirit was agitated. His heart was pounding in his chest, as in Isa. 41:7 (Bekhor Shor). Literally, it was "timed"; in his confusion, his thoughts turned at one time to this aspect of the dream and at another time to that. This sort of agitation is enough in itself to demonstrate that a dream is meaningful. The dreamer is agitated in this way because he realizes that the dream is saying something significant (Gersonides). The fact that the dream had been repeated toward morning, after the vapors that rise from the stomach to the brain had evaporated, convinced him that it was a meaningful dream (Abarbanel).

9 I must make mention today of my offenses. My two offenses: angering the king, and forgetting the boy who asked me to remember him (Bekhor Shor). I cannot inform the king about the man who is able to interpret his dreams without mentioning my offenses (Gersonides). I am not complaining about being imprisoned; it was my own fault (Sforno).

10 Once Pharaoh was angry with his servants. One does not address the king as if speaking to him face to face but in the third

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NJPS together with the chief baker. [11]We had dreams the same night, he and I, each of us a dream with a meaning of its own. [12]A Hebrew youth was there with us, a servant of the chief steward; and when we told him our dreams, he interpreted them for us, telling each of the meaning of his dream. [13]And as he interpreted for us, so it came to pass: I was restored to my post, and the other was impaled."

שַׂר הַטַּבָּחִים אֹתִי וְאֶת שַׂר הָאֹפִים׃
11 וַנַּחַלְמָה חֲלוֹם בְּלַיְלָה אֶחָד אֲנִי וָהוּא
אִישׁ כְּפִתְרוֹן חֲלֹמוֹ חָלָמְנוּ׃ 12 וְשָׁם אִתָּנוּ
נַעַר עִבְרִי עֶבֶד לְשַׂר הַטַּבָּחִים וַנְּסַפֶּר־לוֹ
וַיִּפְתָּר־לָנוּ אֶת־חֲלֹמֹתֵינוּ אִישׁ כַּחֲלֹמוֹ
פָּתָר׃ 13 וַיְהִי כַּאֲשֶׁר פָּתַר־לָנוּ כֵּן הָיָה
אֹתִי הֵשִׁיב עַל־כַּנִּי וְאֹתוֹ תָלָה׃

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why does he say that they both had "a dream" (v. 11; again, see OJPS)?

OJPS the chief baker. [11]And we dreamed a dream in one night, I and he; we dreamed each man according to the interpretation of his dream. [12]And there was with us there a young man, a Hebrew, servant to the captain of the guard; and we told him, and he interpreted to us our dreams; to each man according to his dream he did interpret. [13]And it came to pass, as he interpreted to us, so it was: I was restored unto mine office, and he was hanged."

RASHI **11 Each of us a dream with a meaning of its own.** More precisely, "each man according to the interpretation of his dream" (OJPS), an interpretation matching the dream, which he interpreted for us in a way that resembled the dream.

12 A Hebrew youth was there with us, a servant of the chief steward. Damn these wicked people who can't even do someone a favor without insulting him! He says Joseph is a "boy" and therefore a fool, not fit for greatness; a "Hebrew," who does not even know our language; and a "servant," when it was written in the laws of Egypt that no servant could reign or wear noble raiment. **Telling each of the meaning of his dream.** The meaning that matched the dream.

13 I was restored to my post. Literally, "me, he [Pharaoh] restored to my post." It is an abbreviated text. The only person who could restore him to his post was Pharaoh himself (who "was angry with his servants," v. 10), so there was no need to repeat the word here. When it is obvious which person must be performing a particular action, biblical verses quite frequently omit the subject.

KIMHI repetition in Neh. 4:17, and Judg. 9:19 actually repeats an entire long phrase from Judg. 9:16 after an interruption that is two verses long.

12 A Hebrew youth. Rather, a "boy" in the sense of a servant. **A servant of the chief steward.** So he could be identified there and summoned by name.

NAHMANIDES **12 Telling each of the meaning of his dream.** Rashi would have done better to say that he told *each* of them what truly would happen to him. (See similarly 49:28.) One should not read this verse to imply that the two men had a single dream with a single interpretation. They had different dreams, with different interpretations. Similarly, 49:28 is not saying that Jacob gave each of them an equal blessing, but that each one got a special blessing "appropriate to him."

RASHBAM word for king; all Egyptian kings are called this, just as Philistine kings were called Abimelech, not only here in Genesis but as late as the time of David: "Of David, when he feigned madness in the presence of Abimelech" (Ps. 34:1). Kings of Jerusalem were known as Melchizedek (see 14:18) or Adoni-zedek (see Josh. 10:1); again, you can find Melchizedek used even in David's time (see Ps. 110:4). Kings of Amalek were called Agag (see Num. 24:7 in the days of Moses and 1 Sam. 15:8 during Saul's time). Here, too, Pharaoh is the king's title, not his name. One would not say to the king's face "David was angry with his servants" but "the king was angry with his servants." And that is exactly what is happening here. So in v. 44, Pharaoh is not telling Joseph his name, but asserting (as in v. 40) that *he* is the king. Indeed, in v. 43, Joseph has just been called Abrek, "father to the king." Lekah Tov explains the word just as I do.

12 Telling each of the meaning of his dream. And, indeed, "as he interpreted for us, so it came to pass" (v. 13).

IBN EZRA "Hiram" in Tyre. Even today, every Ishmaelite king is called Nagid, "the Prince of the Believers." That is how we can find Pharaoh in the time of Abraham as well as in the time of Joseph. *Le Pharaoh est mort; vive le Pharaoh!* In Jeremiah's time, the text explains the meaning of the word for us: "I will deliver Pharaoh Hophra, king of Egypt, into the hands of his enemies" (Jer. 44:30). Pharaoh means "king of Egypt." Hophra was the man's own name. Afterward, he was replaced by a Pharaoh named Neco (Jer. 46:2). Further proof is our own verse, where the cupbearer calls him Pharaoh; Joseph does the same in vv. 16, 28, 34, and so on. People just don't call kings by their personal names. **Together with the chief baker.** In the Hebrew, he says "me" a second time (see OJPS). But it is natural for people to speak this way; Reuben similarly repeats "I" in the Hebrew of 37:30.

11 Each of us a dream with a meaning of its own. See my comment to 40:5.

13 I was restored to my post. Rather, "He [Pharaoh] restored me." (The next phrase has the same syntax.) But some think he is saying, "*He* [Joseph] restored me and hanged him." That is, "Joseph said I would be restored and the baker hanged." Or perhaps he means that Joseph's interpretation made it so.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS person (Bekhor Shor). With both of us equally, so Joseph could not have known which of us would be exonerated (Abarbanel). **And placed me in custody in the house of the chief steward, together with the chief baker.** There was no difference in our accommodations that could have tipped Joseph off (Abarbanel).

11 We had dreams the same night. So there was no difference in the astrological signs that could have revealed something to Joseph (Abarbanel). **He and I, each of us a dream.** We had almost exactly similar dreams. Yet Joseph in his wisdom was able to distinguish that one of us would live and one would die (Abarbanel).

12 A Hebrew youth was there with us, a servant. Why did he use these three derogatory terms? "If Joseph interprets the dreams, he might rise to power and then remember that I forgot him." But normally they would not install a foreign slave as ruler (Bekhor Shor). He also denigrated Joseph because he did not want the king to be angry at him for not mentioning until now that there was such a great sage in the country (Hizkuni). He was inexperienced, a foreigner, and did not leave the prison, so again there nothing that might have tipped him off to the meaning of the dreams (Abarbanel). **We told him our dreams.** Not in hopes of an interpretation, but because there was no one else there to talk to (Abarbanel). **He interpreted them for us, telling each of the meaning of his dream.** Nevertheless, despite all those handicaps, he did not expound on the symbolism of the dreams but told each of us precisely what would happen (Abarbanel).

13 And as he interpreted for us, so it came to pass: I was restored to my post, and the other was impaled. He does not

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NJPS 14Thereupon Pharaoh sent for Joseph, and he was rushed from the dungeon. He had his hair cut and changed his clothes, and he appeared before Pharaoh. 15And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I have had a dream, but no one can interpret it. Now I have heard it said of you that for you to hear a dream is to tell its meaning." 16Joseph answered Pharaoh, saying, "Not I! God will see to Pharaoh's welfare."

17Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "In my dream, I was standing on the bank of the Nile, 18when out of the Nile came up seven sturdy and well-formed cows and grazed in the reed grass. 19Presently there followed them seven other cows, scrawny, ill-formed, and emaciated—never had I seen their likes for ugliness in all the land of Egypt! 20And the seven lean and ugly cows ate up the first seven cows, the

OJPS 14Then Pharaoh sent and called Joseph, and they brought him hastily out of the dungeon. And he shaved himself, and changed his raiment, and came in unto Pharaoh. 15And Pharaoh said unto Joseph: "I have dreamed a dream, and there is none that can interpret it; and I have heard say of thee, that when thou hearest a dream thou canst interpret it." 16And Joseph answered Pharaoh, saying: "It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh an answer of peace."

17And Pharaoh spoke unto Joseph: "In my dream, behold, I stood upon the brink of the river. 18And, behold, there came up out of the river seven kine, fat-fleshed and well-favored; and they fed in the reed-grass. 19And, behold, seven other kine came up after them, poor and very ill-favored and lean-fleshed, such as I never saw in all the land of Egypt for badness. 20And the lean and ill-favored kine did eat up the first

14 וַיִּשְׁלַח פַּרְעֹה וַיִּקְרָא אֶת־יוֹסֵף וַיְרִיצֻהוּ
מִן־הַבּוֹר וַיְגַלַּח וַיְחַלֵּף שִׂמְלֹתָיו וַיָּבֹא
אֶל־פַּרְעֹה׃ 15 וַיֹּאמֶר פַּרְעֹה אֶל־יוֹסֵף
חֲלוֹם חָלַמְתִּי וּפֹתֵר אֵין אֹתוֹ וַאֲנִי
שָׁמַעְתִּי עָלֶיךָ לֵאמֹר תִּשְׁמַע חֲלוֹם לִפְתֹּר
אֹתוֹ׃ 16 וַיַּעַן יוֹסֵף אֶת־פַּרְעֹה לֵאמֹר
בִּלְעָדָי אֱלֹהִים יַעֲנֶה אֶת־שְׁלוֹם פַּרְעֹה׃
17 וַיְדַבֵּר פַּרְעֹה אֶל־יוֹסֵף בַּחֲלֹמִי הִנְנִי
עֹמֵד עַל־שְׂפַת הַיְאֹר׃ 18 וְהִנֵּה מִן־הַיְאֹר
עֹלֹת שֶׁבַע פָּרוֹת בְּרִיאוֹת בָּשָׂר וִיפֹת תֹּאַר
וַתִּרְעֶינָה בָּאָחוּ׃ 19 וְהִנֵּה שֶׁבַע־פָּרוֹת
אֲחֵרוֹת עֹלוֹת אַחֲרֵיהֶן דַּלּוֹת וְרָעוֹת תֹּאַר
מְאֹד וְרַקּוֹת בָּשָׂר לֹא־רָאִיתִי כָהֵנָּה בְּכָל־
אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לָרֹעַ׃ 20 וַתֹּאכַלְנָה הַפָּרוֹת
הָרַקּוֹת וְהָרָעוֹת אֵת שֶׁבַע הַפָּרוֹת

RASHI **14 From the dungeon**. From the prison, which was constructed like a "pit" (which is what the Hebrew literally says). Such pits are often used as cisterns, but the Hebrew word can be used even for a pit in which there is no water. **He had his hair cut**. Out of respect for the king.

15 Now I have heard it said of you that for you to hear a dream is to tell its meaning. Literally, "that you can hear a dream to interpret it." But "to hear" in Hebrew often means "to understand," as in "They did not know that Joseph *understood*" (42:23); "a nation whose language you do not *understand*" (Deut. 28:49).

16 Not I! The wisdom is not mine. **God will see to Pharaoh's welfare**. Literally, He will "answer." The Holy One will put an answer in my mouth "for Pharaoh's welfare."

19 Scrawny. Literally, "poor" (OJPS), implying physical weakness: "Why are you so *dejected*, O prince?" (2 Sam. 13:4). **Emaciated**. The Hebrew word always implies an absence of flesh.

KIMHI **14 He was rushed from the dungeon**. Because "the king's mission was urgent" (1 Sam. 21:9). **He had his hair cut and changed his clothes**. One must look presentable to enter the presence of a king.

16 Not I! It is not for me to interpret according to my own intellect. **God will see to Pharaoh's welfare**. God will make the dream come out well for you.

17 Then Pharaoh said to Joseph. We have already explained that when a person repeats something, he might add or subtract or change a few words. He only makes sure that the basic meaning is the same. That is true here as well, when Pharaoh recounts the dream.

19 Emaciated. When the word begins with ר, **[A]** the root is רקק; the "wafers" of (e.g.) Exod. 29:2 are from this same root.

[A] Contrast the rhyming word beginning with ד, which also occurs in these dream stories.

RASHBAM **15 For you to hear a dream is to tell its meaning**. Rather, "that you understand dreams and know how to interpret them."

16 Not I! It does not depend on me. **God will see to Pharaoh's welfare**. The Holy One will make known the interpretation of your welfare.

IBN EZRA **14 He was rushed from the dungeon**. Again, it is literally, "they [the rushers] rushed him." **He had his hair cut**. "He [the barber] cut his hair."

16 Not I! An interesting compound word: "[It's] not up to me." He is talking about the dream interpretation mentioned in v. 15, and saying, "It is God who will see to Pharaoh's welfare by means of my interpretation." **[A]** Others think Joseph is saying, "God will interpret the dream, not I, and He will see to Pharaoh's welfare." **God will see to Pharaoh's welfare**. The verb does not mean "answer" (OJPS) here; it conveys the meaning of constantly furnishing one's needs, as in "the earth shall *respond* with new grain and wine and oil" (Hosea 2:24). Such a response is of course a kind of answer.

19 Scrawny, ill-formed, and emaciated. "Scrawny" is added to the description in v. 3; "ill-formed" is (in Hebrew) a slight variation on "ugly," with the same meaning.

[A] Ibn Ezra's comment here is slightly obscure.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS mention the "three days" aspect, thinking that Pharaoh might suspect Joseph knew about the birthday celebration; he would therefore not be impressed by this detail (Abarbanel).

14 He was rushed from the dungeon. Redemption from the Lord always comes suddenly, as when the Israelites were "driven out of Egypt and could not delay" (Exod. 12:39). See also Mal. 3:1 and Ps. 81:14–15 (Sforno). **He had his hair cut**. He "had not pared his toenails, or trimmed his mustache" (2 Sam. 19:25) since the day he was put in prison (Bekhor Shor). **And changed his clothes**. He changed out of his prison uniform (Bekhor Shor). It is not clear whether the new clothes were provided by the chief cupbearer or by the palace (Abarbanel).

16 Not I! Not I alone can interpret your dream. You think "no one can interpret it" (v. 15), but there are certainly others who could do so (Sforno).

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NJPS sturdy ones; [21]but when they had consumed them, one could not tell that they had consumed them, for they looked just as bad as before. And I awoke. [22]In my other dream, I saw seven ears of grain, full and healthy, growing on a single stalk; [23]but right behind them sprouted seven ears, shriveled, thin, and scorched by the east wind. [24]And the thin ears swallowed the seven healthy ears. I have told my magicians, but none has an explanation for me."

[25]And Joseph said to Pharaoh, "Pharaoh's dreams are one and the same: God has told Pharaoh what He is about to do. [26]The seven healthy cows are seven years, and the seven healthy ears are seven years; it is the same dream. [27]The seven lean and ugly cows that followed are seven years, as are also the seven empty ears scorched by

הָרִאשֹׁנוֹת הַבְּרִיאֹת׃ [21] וַתָּבֹאנָה אֶל־
קִרְבֶּנָה וְלֹא נוֹדַע כִּי־בָאוּ אֶל־קִרְבֶּנָה
וּמַרְאֵיהֶן רַע כַּאֲשֶׁר בַּתְּחִלָּה וָאִיקָץ׃
[22] וָאֵרֶא בַּחֲלֹמִי וְהִנֵּה ׀ שֶׁבַע שִׁבֳּלִים
עֹלֹת בְּקָנֶה אֶחָד מְלֵאֹת וְטֹבוֹת׃ [23] וְהִנֵּה
שֶׁבַע שִׁבֳּלִים צְנֻמוֹת דַּקּוֹת שְׁדֻפוֹת קָדִים
צֹמְחוֹת אַחֲרֵיהֶם׃ [24] וַתִּבְלַעְנָה הַשִּׁבֳּלִים
הַדַּקּוֹת אֵת שֶׁבַע הַשִּׁבֳּלִים הַטֹּבוֹת וָאֹמַר
אֶל־הַחַרְטֻמִּים וְאֵין מַגִּיד לִי׃
[25] וַיֹּאמֶר יוֹסֵף אֶל־פַּרְעֹה חֲלוֹם פַּרְעֹה
אֶחָד הוּא אֵת אֲשֶׁר הָאֱלֹהִים עֹשֶׂה הִגִּיד
לְפַרְעֹה׃ [26] שֶׁבַע פָּרֹת הַטֹּבֹת שֶׁבַע שָׁנִים
הֵנָּה וְשֶׁבַע הַשִּׁבֳּלִים הַטֹּבֹת שֶׁבַע שָׁנִים
הֵנָּה חֲלוֹם אֶחָד הוּא׃ [27] וְשֶׁבַע הַפָּרוֹת
הָרַקּוֹת וְהָרָעֹת הָעֹלֹת אַחֲרֵיהֶן שֶׁבַע
שָׁנִים הֵנָּה וְשֶׁבַע הַשִּׁבֳּלִים הָרֵקוֹת

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ If "Pharaoh's dreams" were indeed "one and the same" (v. 25), why did he have two dreams? ✦ Why did Joseph announce that "God has told Pharaoh what He is about to do" before telling Pharaoh what was going to happen?

OJPS seven fat kine. [21]And when they had eaten them up, it could not be known that they had eaten them; but they were still ill-favored as at the beginning. So I awoke. [22]And I saw in my dream, and, behold, seven ears came up upon one stalk, full and good. [23]And, behold, seven ears, withered, thin, and blasted with the east wind, sprung up after them. [24]And the thin ears swallowed up the seven good ears. And I told it unto the magicians; but there was none that could declare it to me."

[25]And Joseph said unto Pharaoh: "The dream of Pharaoh is one; what God is about to do He hath declared unto Pharaoh. [26]The seven good kine are seven years; and the seven good ears are seven years: the dream is one. [27]And the seven lean and ill-favored kine that came up after them are seven years, and also the seven empty ears blasted with the east

RASHI **23 Shriveled.** The same root in Aramaic means "rock." They were shriveled like a tree without moisture, hard as a rock. But Onkelos translates, "with blossoms smitten." There was nothing left but the blossoms, which had been emptied of their seeds.

25 God has told Pharaoh what He is about to do. God specifically "told" him this because it was "about" to happen.

26 The seven healthy cows are seven years, and the seven healthy ears are seven years. But they are the same seven years, repeated to show that "the matter has been determined by God, and that God will soon carry it out" (v. 32).

KIMHI **23 Shriveled.** Though this root does not occur elsewhere in the Bible, it does occur in rabbinic literature; in any case, both the dreams and their interpretation are obvious.

27 Lean. This one is with a ר again. **Empty.** Look carefully; this is not the same Hebrew word as "lean."

RASHBAM **21 One could not tell that they had consumed them.** Pharaoh is saying this now to Joseph: "As I remember the dream, one could not tell that they had consumed them." But in v. 4, we needed to be told only what Pharaoh saw in the dream and not how he felt about what he saw.

23 Shriveled. No other word related to this one appears anywhere in the Bible; it must be understood from context. It seems reasonable to think that it is related to the similar word in the Talmud, indicating something that is hard as rock and totally dry.

25 God has told Pharaoh what He is about to do. Literally, "what He is doing," but the translations understand the idiom correctly. God has told this to Pharaoh because it is Pharaoh's responsibility to issue the decrees that will cope with the situation.

NAHMANIDES **23 Shriveled.** Despite Rashi's comment, when the seeds are gone, there are no blossoms left. Pharaoh did not see any ears in bloom, but rather fully grown, first "full and healthy" ones and now shriveled, thin ones—not "rocky" ones, for thin ears are certainly not "hard as rock." What the Hebrew word means (as revealed by its use on B. Ber. 39a) is "shredded." And that in fact is what Onkelos means as well. In our context, the implication is that the ears were no longer full, but had many patches that were empty of kernels, and other patches, higher on the stalk, that had been smitten so the seeds were not full but thin. Note that Joseph replaces "shriveled" with "empty" (v. 27), referring to the many places where there were no seeds at all.

27 They are seven years of famine. He does not mention the seven years of plenty here, since that was not unusual for Egypt, which according to 13:10 was "like the garden of the LORD." It is the famine that was abnormal; the warning of it was the useful aspect of the dream. God in His mercy had revealed this famine to Pharaoh "to save lives in an extraordinary deliverance" (45:7). And indeed "the seven years of famine set in, just as Joseph had foretold" (v. 54); nothing is mentioned about Joseph foretelling the seven good years.

IBN EZRA **21 They looked just as bad as before.** This is not part of what happened in the dream but of Pharaoh's explanation of it.

23 Shriveled. A hapax legomenon—it occurs nowhere else in the Bible. Obviously it is a synonym of "empty" (v. 27). But some say it means "images," as it does in Arabic.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **25 Pharaoh's dreams are one and the same.** That is why the people who thought they were two separate dreams could not interpret them (Sforno). **God has told Pharaoh what He is about to do.** So that Pharaoh can take steps to remedy the situation. For he is the king and has the power to do so (Bekhor Shor). That is why the magicians did not understand; the demons do not know about this—God has told it to Pharaoh alone (Sforno).

27 They are seven years of famine. Famine and abundance do not alternate on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis, but annually (Bekhor Shor).

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NJPS the east wind; they are seven years of famine. [28]It is just as I have told Pharaoh: God has revealed to Pharaoh what He is about to do. [29]Immediately ahead are seven years of great abundance in all the land of Egypt. [30]After them will come seven years of famine, and all the abundance in the land of Egypt will be forgotten. As the land is ravaged by famine, [31]no trace of the abundance will be left in the land because of the famine thereafter, for it will be very severe. [32]As for Pharaoh having had the same dream twice, it means that the matter has been determined by God, and that God will soon carry it out.

[33]"Accordingly, let Pharaoh find a man of discernment and wisdom, and set him

OJPS wind; they shall be seven years of famine. [28]That is the thing which I spoke unto Pharaoh: what God is about to do He hath shown unto Pharaoh. [29]Behold, there come seven years of great plenty throughout all the land of Egypt. [30]And there shall arise after them seven years of famine; and all the plenty shall be forgotten in the land of Egypt; and the famine shall consume the land; [31]and the plenty shall not be known in the land by reason of that famine which followeth; for it shall be very grievous. [32]And for that the dream was doubled unto Pharaoh twice, it is because the thing is established by God, and God will shortly bring it to pass.

[33]Now therefore let Pharaoh look out a man discreet and wise, and set him over

שִׁדָּפוֹת הַקָּדִים יִהְיוּ֙ שֶׁ֣בַע שְׁנֵ֔י רָעָ֖ב׃
28 הֽוּא־הַדָּבָ֗ר אֲשֶׁ֤ר דִּבַּ֙רְתִּי֙ אֶל־פַּרְעֹ֔ה
אֲשֶׁ֥ר הָאֱלֹהִ֖ים עֹשֶׂ֣ה הֶרְאָ֑ה אֶת־פַּרְעֹֽה׃
29 הִנֵּ֣ה שֶׁ֤בַע שָׁנִים֙ בָּאֹ֔ות שָׂבָ֖ע גָּד֑וֹל
בְּכָל־אֶ֖רֶץ מִצְרָֽיִם׃ 30 וְקָמ֣וּ שֶׁ֤בַע שְׁנֵי֙ רָעָ֔ב
אַחֲרֵיהֶ֑ן וְנִשְׁכַּ֤ח כָּל־הַשָּׂבָע֙ בְּאֶ֣רֶץ מִצְרָ֔יִם
וְכִלָּ֥ה הָרָעָ֖ב אֶת־הָאָֽרֶץ׃ 31 וְלֹֽא־יִוָּדַ֥ע
הַשָּׂבָ֖ע בָּאָ֑רֶץ מִפְּנֵ֣י הָרָעָ֔ב הַהֽוּא־אַחֲרֵי־
כֵ֑ן כִּי־כָבֵ֥ד הֽוּא־מְאֹֽד׃ 32 וְעַל֙ הִשָּׁנֹ֣ות
הַחֲלֹ֔ום אֶל־פַּרְעֹ֖ה פַּעֲמָ֑יִם כִּי־נָכ֥וֹן הַדָּבָ֖ר
מֵעִ֣ם הָאֱלֹהִ֑ים וּמְמַהֵ֥ר הָאֱלֹהִ֖ים לַעֲשֹׂתֹֽו׃
33 וְעַתָּ֣ה יֵרֶ֤א פַּרְעֹה֙ אִ֣ישׁ נָבֹ֔ון וְחָכֶ֖ם

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why does Joseph repeat, "God has revealed to Pharaoh what He is about to do" (v. 28)? ✦ Since Joseph's task was only to interpret the dreams, where does he come off giving Pharaoh the advice to "find a man of discernment and wisdom" (v. 33)?

RASHI **28 God has revealed to Pharaoh what He is about to do.** "Revealed" because these seven bad years were farther off.

30 All the abundance in the land of Egypt will be forgotten. This is the interpretation of the swallowing.

31 No trace of the abundance will be left. Literally, it "shall not be known" (OJPS); this is the interpretation of "one could not tell that they had consumed them" (v. 21), where OJPS similarly translates more literally: "it could not be known."

32 The matter has been determined by God. Literally, it is "established" (OJPS), that is, "in readiness."

RASHBAM **29 Abundance.** Notice that this word is pronounced *savá,* like *davar* or *bakar* or *ra'av* or any similar standard noun.

30 And all the abundance in the land of Egypt will be forgotten. As indicated by "one could not tell that they had consumed them" (v. 21).

32 As for Pharaoh having had the same dream twice. Joseph too "had the same dream twice," but not in the same night. Otherwise they would have come to pass as quickly as these.

KIMHI **28 God has revealed to Pharaoh what He is about to do.** In v. 25 he said, "God has *told* Pharaoh what He is about to do." A third verse packs both of these expressions into one, preserving the correct order: "Samuel was afraid to *report* the *vision* to Eli" (1 Sam. 3:15).

32 As for Pharaoh having had the same dream twice. More literally, "as for the dream being *doubled* unto Pharaoh twice" (compare OJPS)—Joseph is trying to make Pharaoh understand as clearly as possible that the repetition of the dream has implications.

IBN EZRA **29 Abundance.** Notice that this word is pronounced *savá*—not *sóva*. It is a noun, not a participle. The people who pronounce this word as *sóva* during Sabbath prayers are pronouncing it wrong.

31 No trace of the abundance will be left. Because once they consumed them, "they looked just as bad as before" (v. 21).

32 As for Pharaoh having had the same dream twice. The cows and the ears of grain represent the same thing, confirmation that the matter had been determined. **God will soon carry it out.** The fact that both dreams occurred in the same night was the proof of this.

NAHMANIDES **32 As for Pharaoh having had the same dream twice.** Twice in one night. He might have seen the cows and the ears of grain in a single dream, and that would have been enough to warn him that there would be "no yield from tilling" (45:6). **[B]** Instead, this was divided into two dreams that followed one after the other in a single night, which is not how people usually dream. That was to show how quickly this would happen. But even though it all happened in a single night, it was not "doubled" (OJPS) during a single occurrence but in two separate ones. Ibn Ezra apparently thinks each dream included both plowing and harvest, in which case repeating the dream about the ears of grain, which directly represented the famine, would have been enough.

33 A man of discernment and wisdom. It would require "discernment" to know how to distribute the food equitably enough to preserve the children's lives and still have enough left to sell to other lands to increase Pharaoh's wealth. The "wisdom" (which in Hebrew can refer to technical skill) would be needed to keep the grain preserved without spoilage, since each species would need to be taken care of differently (see, e.g., the end of B. Shab. 31a; Genesis Rabbah also mentions this topic). Joseph, of course, said all this so that they would choose him: "A wise man has his eyes in his head" (Eccles. 2:14).

[B] See Nahmanides' comment to v. 2.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **33 Let Pharaoh find a man of discernment and wisdom, and set him over the land of Egypt.** Someone who can keep the overseers honest and persuade the people to go along with the plan (Gersonides). Let Pharaoh do so "now" (OJPS)—there is no time for delay (Abarbanel). A man who is intelligent and politically astute (Sforno).

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NJPS over the land of Egypt. 34And let Pharaoh take steps to appoint overseers over the land, and organize the land of Egypt in the seven years of plenty. 35Let all the food of these good years that are coming be gathered, and let the grain be collected under Pharaoh's authority as food to be stored in the cities. 36Let that food be a reserve for the land for the seven years of famine which will come upon the land of Egypt, so that the land may not perish in the famine."

37The plan pleased Pharaoh and all his

וישיתהו על־ארץ מצרים׃ 34 יעשה
פרעה ויפקד פקדים על־הארץ וחמש
את־ארץ מצרים בשבע שני השבע׃
35 ויקבצו את־כל־אכל השנים הטבת
הבאת האלה ויצברו־בר תחת יד־פרעה
אכל בערים ושמרו׃ 36 והיה האכל
לפקדון לארץ לשבע שני הרעב אשר
תהיין בארץ מצרים ולא־תכרת הארץ
ברעב׃
37 ויישר הדבר בעיני פרעה ובעיני כל־

OJPS the land of Egypt. 34Let Pharaoh do this, and let him appoint overseers over the land, and take up the fifth part of the land of Egypt in the seven years of plenty. 35And let them gather all the food of these good years that come, and lay up corn under the hand of Pharaoh for food in the cities, and let them keep it. 36And the food shall be for a store to the land against the seven years of famine, which shall be in the land of Egypt; that the land perish not through the famine."

37And the thing was good in the eyes of

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ If Pharaoh is going to "appoint overseers" (v. 34) and so forth, what need is there for "a man of discernment and wisdom"? ✦ Where in this whole story were overseers appointed, whether by Pharaoh or by Joseph?

RASHI **34 And organize the land of Egypt**. NJPS (following Onkelos) translates correctly. The use of the verb here resembles its use in "the Israelites went up armed out of the land of Egypt" (Exod. 13:18).

35 Under Pharaoh's authority. That is the sense of the idiom "under the hand of Pharaoh" (OJPS): under his authority and in his storehouses.

36 Let that food. That food that was "collected" (v. 35). **Be a reserve**. Literally, "a deposit" like any other, hidden away for safekeeping, to keep the country going.

KIMHI **35 Let all the food of these good years that are coming be gathered**. All of the one-fifth share mentioned in the previous verse.

36 Let that food be a reserve. Literally, a "deposit." Even though they will have to buy it back, they will be happy to find some grain deposited there.

37 The plan pleased Pharaoh and all his courtiers. Rather, "the thing" (OJPS) pleased them—they understood that the plan was a good one, and believed that Joseph

NAHMANIDES **34 Let Pharaoh take steps to appoint overseers over the land**. The "man of discernment" could obviously not be expected to be everywhere at once.

36 Let that food be a reserve for the land. A "reserve" is something that is "overseen"; the word is related to the "overseers" of v. 34. The overseers would keep an eye on this food so that there would be plenty for the land during the seven years of famine. They should not distribute any of this food for any other purpose, thus making sure that the land would not perish during the famine, just as the cows had not died despite their emaciation.

RASHBAM **34 Let Pharaoh take steps to appoint overseers over the land, and organize the land of Egypt**. Rather, "and take one-fifth of the land of Egypt." The overseers should collect one-fifth of the produce of Egypt for royal use rather than the one-tenth that was standard for kings: "He will take a tenth part of your grain" (1 Sam. 8:15). That is, the king should now collect twice as much. This is in fact what Joseph ended up doing: "Joseph made it into a land law in Egypt, which is still valid, that a fifth should be Pharaoh's" (47:26).

35 Let the grain be collected under Pharaoh's authority. Literally, "let them [the overseers]...collect grain under the hand of Pharaoh" (compare OJPS). "Under Pharaoh's hand" means that it would be done by an appointee. All this was to be done with or without the express consent of the Egyptians. We find the same expressions used with King Ahasuerus of Persia: "Let Your Majesty *appoint officers* in every province of your realm *to assemble* all the beautiful young virgins at the fortress Shushan, in the harem *under the supervision of* Hege" (Esther 2:3). The food would be "gathered" (see the beginning of our verse) directly from the owners of the fields and "collected" by the keepers of the storehouses. And, indeed, Joseph "*gathered* all the grain of the seven years" (v. 48) and "*collected* produce in very large quantity" (v. 49). **As food to be stored in the cities.** So that they could sell it in each city during the years of famine. As the Hebrew literally says, it was "for food in the cities" (OJPS).

IBN EZRA **34 Let Pharaoh take steps**. Literally, let him "do this" (OJPS). But it could mean "make" this, "make" in the sense of "acquire," as in "My own power and the might of my own hand have *won* this wealth for me" (Deut. 8:17). **And organize the land**. Rather, and "five" the land—acquire one-fifth.

35 Let the grain be collected. Rather, "let them" (OJPS)—the "overseers" of v. 34—collect grain. Some think that the particular word used here for "grain" refers to grain that is still on the stalk and has not been threshed yet. But I think it means the opposite, grain that one does not have "to winnow or to *fan*" (Jer. 4:11) because that work has already been done. One person whom I need not name thinks Egypt is too humid for grain to last seven years there because of the Nile. But it could certainly be mixed with preservatives.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **34 And let Pharaoh take steps to appoint overseers**. Rather, "let Pharaoh do this, and let him [the man of discernment and wisdom] appoint overseers" so that they will all know that he is in charge and there will be no differences of opinion (Sforno).

35 Let all the food of these good years that are coming be gathered. By the overseers, in addition to the 20% of the grain that was to be collected; the other food would be so plentiful that it could be bought cheaply, especially when sourced locally (Abarbanel). **Let the grain be collected under Pharaoh's authority**. Rather than under the authority of the overseers, who might be tempted to turn it to their own benefit (Abarbanel). **As food to be stored in the cities.** "To be stored" comes at the end of the Hebrew verse (see OJPS) and is separate from the issue of food; the food was to be put in the cities, but the grain was to be stored in the capital (Abarbanel).

36 Let that food be a reserve. Rather, a "pledge"—this in an effort to make sure the overseers would keep their hands off it (Abarbanel).

37 The plan pleased Pharaoh and all his courtiers. Pharaoh understood at once that Joseph's interpretation was the correct one. Even a dream sent from God is overlaid by the sleeper's own imagination, but when he is told the true interpretation of the dream,

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NJPS courtiers. [38]And Pharaoh said to his courtiers, "Could we find another like him, a man in whom is the spirit of God?" [39]So Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Since God has made all this known to you, there is none so discerning and wise as you. [40]You shall be in charge of my court, and by your command shall all my people be directed; only with respect to the throne shall I be superior to you." [41]Pharaoh further said to Joseph, "See, I put you in charge of all the

OJPS Pharaoh, and in the eyes of all his servants. [38]And Pharaoh said unto his servants: "Can we find such a one as this, a man in whom the spirit of God is?" [39]And Pharaoh said unto Joseph: "Forasmuch as God hath shown thee all this, there is none so discreet and wise as thou. [40]Thou shalt be over my house, and according unto thy word shall all my people be ruled; only in the throne will I be greater than thou." [41]And Pharaoh said unto Joseph: "See, I have set thee over all the land of

עַבָדָיו׃ [38] וַיֹּאמֶר פַּרְעֹה אֶל־עֲבָדָיו
הֲנִמְצָא כָזֶה אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר רוּחַ אֱלֹהִים בּוֹ׃
[39] וַיֹּאמֶר פַּרְעֹה אֶל־יוֹסֵף אַחֲרֵי הוֹדִיעַ
אֱלֹהִים אוֹתְךָ אֶת־כָּל־זֹאת אֵין־נָבוֹן
וְחָכָם כָּמוֹךָ׃ [40] אַתָּה תִּהְיֶה עַל־בֵּיתִי
וְעַל־פִּיךָ יִשַּׁק כָּל־עַמִּי רַק הַכִּסֵּא אֶגְדַּל
מִמֶּךָּ׃ [41] וַיֹּאמֶר פַּרְעֹה אֶל־יוֹסֵף רְאֵה

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Is "a man in whom is the spirit of God" (v. 38) necessarily a wise man? ✦ How did the fact that "God has made all this known to you" lead Pharaoh to think "there is none so discerning and wise" as Joseph (v. 39), especially since any farmer could have interpreted Pharaoh's dreams? ✦ How can Pharaoh put Joseph "in charge of my court" (v. 40) before he finds out whether Joseph's interpretation will in fact come true? ✦ Was it not enough for Pharaoh to put Joseph in charge? Why did he have to introduce that decision with "See" (v. 41)?

RASHI **38 Could we find another like him?** The translations are correct.

39 There is none so discerning and wise as you. If we tried to "find a man of discernment and wisdom" (v. 33) as you suggested, we could not find anyone as "discerning and wise" as you.

40 By your command shall all my people be directed. Rather, "be fed, be supported." All the needs of my people shall be taken care of by you. See 15:2 and Ps. 2:12 for other words from the same root. **Only with respect to the throne.** They will still call me king. The "throne" is a metaphor for kingship: "May He exalt his throne even higher than the throne of my lord King David" (1 Kings 1:37).

41 I put you. That is, "I appoint you, I *put* you" into that position, as in "He will *set* you . . . high above all the nations" (Deut. 26:19). And one can be "set" either high or low: "I, in turn, have *made* you despicable and vile in the eyes of all the people" (Mal. 2:9).

RASHBAM **38 A man in whom is the spirit of God.** Not only for dream interpretation but even more for his practical wisdom.

39 Discerning. Discerning the future and able to extrapolate from the present. **Wise.** Gaining wisdom from what he has seen and heard.

40 By your command shall all my people be directed. Literally, they shall be "armed," as if ready for war against an enemy: "a fortified city and *weapons*" (2 Kings 10:2); "the Ephraimites *armed* with bows" (Ps. 78:9).

41 I put you in charge. The Hebrew uses a past tense: "I have put you in charge" (compare OJPS). But the idiom means "I am now putting you in charge." Notice that Pharaoh says this as he puts the ring on Joseph's hand.

KIMHI was interpreting the dream correctly, since they could see how well the interpretation matched the dream. And of course they had heard from the chief cupbearer that Joseph's previous interpretations had panned out. Moreover, Joseph had not dragged out the interpretation but had said right away, "immediately ahead are seven years of great abundance" (v. 29) and so forth.

38 Could we find another like him, a man in whom is the spirit of God? Clearly his wisdom is greater than that of "all the magicians of Egypt, and all its wise men" (v. 8); it must be because the spirit of God is in him.

41 See, I put you in charge of all the land of Egypt. Run the country in accordance with your intelligence.

IBN EZRA **38 Could we find another like him?** Rather, "has another like him been found [anywhere in the world]?" It is a Niphal verb, a past-tense passive form. But it could be an active first-person plural Qal form. So the translations of NJPS and OJPS are not impossible.

40 You shall be in charge of my court. The Hebrew says merely, "over my house" (OJPS), but the implication is indeed that Joseph will be "in charge" of it. **By your command shall all my people be directed.** Rather, "armed" (note the *dagesh* in the ש that takes the place of the missing נ). Joseph is to be the commander of the army. Some think our word is from the homonym of that verb, which means "to kiss," but that is totally implausible. **Only with respect to the throne shall I be superior to you.** For the use of a noun as an adverb, compare "wilted of leaf" (Isa. 1:30); see also Ps. 2:12.

NAHMANIDES **38 Could we find another like him?** Pharaoh knew that the Egyptians hated the Hebrews and hated to mingle with them, let alone to eat something touched by a Hebrew (for they considered them unclean). So he did not want to appoint Joseph without their agreement. Now he tells them they will not find anyone else like Joseph, **a man in whom is the spirit of God.** And they all agreed.

39 Since God has made all this known to you. The interpretation was so obvious once he said it that it all seemed to Pharaoh and his courtiers to be as good as done. But perhaps "all this" also refers to what the chief cupbearer had told him, as when Jacob "told Laban all that had happened" (29:13). **There is none so discerning and wise as you.** In such matters, given that God has made all these obscure dreams clear to you. Nothing of what you have predicted has yet failed to happen. So you had better be my second-in-command for this situation.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS especially when he hears it so soon afterward, he remembers what he has forgotten and recognizes that the interpretation is correct (Abarbanel).

38 Could we find another like him, a man in whom is the spirit of God? Only one in whom was the spirit of God could have zeroed in on the divine inspiration of my dream (Abarbanel).

40 By your command shall all my people be directed. Literally, they shall be "armed"; Joseph was being given the power of declaring war (Hizkuni). **Only with respect to the throne shall I be superior to you.** I alone shall sit on the throne (Gersonides).

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NJPS land of Egypt." 42And removing his signet ring from his hand, Pharaoh put it on Joseph's hand; and he had him dressed in robes of fine linen, and put a gold chain about his neck. 43He had him ride in the chariot of his second-in-command, and they cried before him, "Abrek!" Thus he placed him over all the land of Egypt.

44Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I am Pharaoh; yet without you, no one shall lift up

נָתַתִּי אֹתְךָ עַל כָּל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם׃ 42 וַיָּסַר פַּרְעֹה אֶת־טַבַּעְתּוֹ מֵעַל יָדוֹ וַיִּתֵּן אֹתָהּ עַל־יַד יוֹסֵף וַיַּלְבֵּשׁ אֹתוֹ בִּגְדֵי־שֵׁשׁ וַיָּשֶׂם רְבִד הַזָּהָב עַל־צַוָּארוֹ׃ 43 וַיַּרְכֶּב אֹתוֹ בְּמִרְכֶּבֶת הַמִּשְׁנֶה אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ וַיִּקְרְאוּ לְפָנָיו אַבְרֵךְ וְנָתוֹן אֹתוֹ עַל כָּל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם׃ 44 וַיֹּאמֶר פַּרְעֹה אֶל־יוֹסֵף אֲנִי פַרְעֹה וּבִלְעָדֶיךָ לֹא־יָרִים אִישׁ אֶת־יָדוֹ וְאֶת־

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why did Pharaoh's words have to be introduced three times by "Pharaoh said" (vv. 39, 41, and 44) rather than just once?

OJPS Egypt." 42And Pharaoh took off his signet ring from his hand, and put it upon Joseph's hand, and arrayed him in vestures of fine linen, and put a gold chain about his neck. 43And he made him to ride in the second chariot which he had; and they cried before him: "Abrech"; and he set him over all the land of Egypt.

44And Pharaoh said unto Joseph: "I am Pharaoh, and without thee shall no man

RASHI **42 Removing his signet ring from his hand, Pharaoh put it on Joseph's hand.** The presentation of the ring symbolizes that the recipient has become second-in-command. **Robes of fine linen.** Something highly regarded in Egypt. **A gold chain.** The Hebrew word for "chain" implies a necklace with rings tightly interlocked: "I have *decked* my couch *with covers* of dyed Egyptian linen" (Prov. 7:16). See the use of this root in M. Mid. 1:8 for stones tiled together to form a pavement.

43 The chariot of his second-in-command. Rather, "in the second chariot" (OJPS), the one that rode next to Pharaoh's own. **Abrek!** That is, as Onkelos explains, *av* ("father") to the *rex* ("king" in Latin). You will find the same word on B. BB 4a, where Herod is told, "you are neither a *reka* nor the son of a *reka*." But a midrash has R. Judah taking it to mean that Joseph was both *av*, a "father," in wisdom, and *rak*, "tender" in years. Said R. Yose b. Durmaskit: How long must you twist biblical verses on us? *Abrek* is from *birkayim*, and it means "Bend the knee!" No one could do anything without Joseph's permission: **Thus he placed him over all the land of Egypt.**

44 I am Pharaoh. I have the power to issue decrees for my kingdom. And I decree that no one shall lift his hand **without you**, that is, without your permission. Another reading: He is repeating what he said in v. 40. **No one shall lift up hand or foot.** As Onkelos explains, "no one shall lift up hand to bear arms or foot to mount a horse."

KIMHI **43 He had him ride in the chariot of his second-in-command.** That is, in the official chariot of the second-in-command. **Abrek!** א has replaced the standard ה of the infinitive absolute: "Bending the knee!" They were indicating, "This man well deserves to be put in charge of the entire land of Egypt."

44 I am Pharaoh. Even though I am the king.

NAHMANIDES **42 Removing his signet ring from his hand.** See Rashi's comment; in fact, the king's ring is his seal, as with the decrees that were "sealed with the king's signet ring" (Esther 8:8). He is giving Joseph the ring so that Joseph can issue the necessary decrees throughout the land and seal with the king's signet ring whatever he wants to.

43 The chariot of his second-in-command. Despite Rashi and OJPS, "second" here is not an adjective but a noun. **[C]** The point is that the king has a primary chariot, just as there is "a horse on which the king has ridden" (Esther 6:8), and also a chariot for his second-in-command and even chariots for his "thirds." **[D]**

[C] In fact, the text of Nahmanides as we have it says exactly the opposite. His explanation (omitted here) is therefore extremely obscure, but his conclusion about what the words mean is clear. **[D]** The "officers" (see the Hebrew) of Exod. 14:7 and Exod. 15:4.

RASHBAM **42 Robes of fine linen.** Egyptian linen is the finest: "embroidered linen from Egypt" (Ezek. 27:7). **A gold chain.** The Hebrew word describes something that is draped over the man: "I have *decked* my couch with *covers*" (Prov. 7:16).

43 In the chariot of his second-in-command. Rather, "on his second-in-command's *ride*," the horse or donkey reserved for the king's second-in-command to ride. **Abrek!** "Father to the king." As Joseph will later tell his brothers, God "has made me a father to Pharaoh" (45:8), that is, "father to the king." Remember that Pharaoh is the Egyptian word for king; see my comment to v. 10. "Father" in this sense is the king's chief of staff.

44 I am Pharaoh. I am the king. (See also v. 40.) **Without you, no one shall lift up hand or foot in all the land of Egypt.** No one shall exercise power, as did Jeroboam when he "raised his hand" (1 Kings 11:27); as the verse that follows that one explains, "Solomon . . . appointed him over all the forced labor of the House of Joseph" (1 Kings 11:28).

IBN EZRA **42 Robes of fine linen.** I will explain the latter in my comment to "fine linen" in Exod. 25:4. **A gold chain.** As in "I have *decked* my couch with *covers*" (Prov. 7:16).

43 The chariot. A wooden vehicle pulled by four horses; see 1 Kings 10:29 for proof. **[B] His second-in-command.** The king, of course, is number one. Notice that the "officers" of Exod. 14:7 and elsewhere are really "number threes." **Abrek!** "I kneel down!" It is a Hiphil imperfect. See similarly "kneeling in front of the whole congregation" (2 Chron. 6:13), though that example is a Qal. Jonah ibn Janah thinks this word is an infinitive used as an imperative, with א replacing the expected ה. (For an example of the standard form, see Jer. 25:4. But see Jer. 25:3 for a first-person form like the one in our verse.)

44 I am Pharaoh; yet without you. I alone am king; no other man but me is on his own authority save you. **No one shall lift up hand or foot.** "Foot"—no one has permission to go anywhere. Or it is an idiom, which is the correct explanation.

[B] Ibn Ezra says merely "Solomon's chariot"; 1 Kings 10:29 identifies the price of a horse as 150 shekels and the price of a chariot as 600.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **42 And removing his signet ring from his hand, Pharaoh put it on Joseph's hand.** Perhaps he has just been making this up to get away from me. I will put the responsibility for solving the crisis on him. If he accepts it, I will know that his words are true (Hizkuni). **He had him dressed in robes of fine linen.** Which only the king and the nobles were permitted to wear (Hizkuni). These were very expensive in Egypt (Gersonides).

44 I am Pharaoh. This is the same thing he said in v. 40; but it needed to be restated once Joseph was given the signet ring (Hizkuni). So have no fear of my underlings, let alone of the people (Abarbanel). **No one shall lift up hand or foot in all the land of Egypt.** Onkelos explains that no one would be permitted to mount a horse without Pharaoh's permission; they would have to ride

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NJPS hand or foot in all the land of Egypt." 45Pharaoh then gave Joseph the name Zaphenath-paneah; and he gave him for a wife Asenath daughter of Poti-phera, priest of On. Thus Joseph emerged in charge of

OJPS lift up his hand or his foot in all the land of Egypt." 45And Pharaoh called Joseph's name Zaphenath-paneah; and he gave him to wife Asenath the daughter of Poti-phera priest of On. And Joseph went

רַגְלוֹ בְּכָל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם׃ 45 וַיִּקְרָא פַרְעֹה
שֵׁם־יוֹסֵף צָפְנַת פַּעְנֵחַ וַיִּתֶּן־לוֹ אֶת־אָסְנַת
בַּת־פּוֹטִי פֶרַע כֹּהֵן אֹן לְאִשָּׁה וַיֵּצֵא יוֹסֵף

RASHI **45 Zaphenath-paneah**. "Explainer of hidden things." "Hidden" is *zaphun*, but no word resembling *paneaḥ* is found anywhere in the Bible. **Poti-phera**. This is Potiphar of 39:1, called Poti-phera once he was turned into a eunuch; *phera* means "removal." Remember that he bought Joseph to use him for sex. **[B] Priest of On**. This is one of the few occurrences where *kohen* does not mean "priest" but simply indicates that he was a prominent official.

[B] See Nahmanides' comment to "when his master heard the story" (39:19).

RASHBAM **45 Zaphenath-paneah**. "Revealer of Hidden Things" (as Onkelos explains); the words are Egyptian. The custom when appointing someone to a position of authority was to give him an appropriate name: "Moses changed the name of Hosea son of Nun to Joshua" (Num. 13:16) when he became his attendant; Daniel too was "called Belteshazzar after the name of my god" (Dan. 4:5). **Poti-phera**. The straightforward sense would seem to be that this is someone different from Potiphar. **Priest of On**. Not "priest" of a god called On, but "ruler" of a city by that name. Compare "David's sons were priests" (2 Sam. 8:18), where the word must obviously refer to a position of rulership, not a religious one.

KIMHI **45 Pharaoh then gave Joseph the name Zaphenath-paneah**. This name is definitely Egyptian. Nebuchadnezzar did the same when he gave Daniel and his comrades Aramaic names. **[B]** As for the commentators who insist on interpreting this name as if it were Hebrew—it would be quite amazing for Pharaoh to give Joseph a name in the holy tongue. **Thus Joseph emerged in charge of the land of Egypt**. Literally, he "went out," that is, he proceeded to seize the authority granted him by Pharaoh.

[B] See Dan. 1:7.

IBN EZRA **45 Zaphenath-paneah**. If this is Egyptian, we do not know what it means. But if it is translated into Hebrew, then we do not know what Joseph was actually called. If *paneaḥ* is a word (see the translation of Onkelos) and not a name, then it is a quadriliteral rather than a standard three-consonant root. **Priest of On**. "Priest" does not tell us whether he was a worshiper of the Holy One or an idolater; in my opinion, it is used throughout the Bible indiscriminately for an "attendant." **Joseph emerged**. Literally, he "went out" (OJPS), that is, his name and reputation went forth, as in "Your beauty *won you fame* among the nations" (Ezek. 16:14). But he may literally have gone forth to travel around the country and let people get to know him.

NAHMANIDES **45 Zaphenath-paneah**. Ibn Ezra does not think this name can mean something in Hebrew and be the exact name the Egyptian king gave him. But he may well have asked Joseph what would be an appropriate name for him in his own language, or indeed the king might well have known some Canaanite, since that was a neighboring country. Don't forget that his daughter gave Moses a name in his own people's language: *mashitihu*, "I drew him out of the water" (Exod. 2:10). Do not be surprised, by the way, that the Egyptian scribes called Moses "Monius." Names change to fit what is comfortable and natural in a particular language. Onkelos, for example, will sometimes replace a Hebrew name with its (different) Aramaic equivalent; see (e.g.) his translation of "between Kadesh and Shur" (20:1). This happens quite frequently, but for other names he simply transliterates them (e.g., Sihon and Og). **[E]** He simply used whatever names were common in the Aramaic of his day. The same applies to the Christian translators. **[F]** **Daughter of Poti-phera, priest of On**. Rashi's understanding (taken from the midrash) forces him to identify this expression (in his comments on 47:22) as one of the few cases where *kohen* does not refer to a religious functionary. Potiphar was certainly not a priest—he was the executioner. The midrash, in my opinion, is saying that Potiphar was ashamed when everyone began calling him Poti-phera, resigned his position, and entered a house of idolatry, where due to his previous high rank he was indeed made a priest. Presumably On was the name of the god worshiped there. Certainly "the priest of Midian" (Exod. 2:16) was a religious functionary; the Sages say Jethro fattened calves for idolatry. The truth is that a *kohen* is a functionary but not necessarily a religious one. Contrast 2 Sam. 8:18, where David's sons are called *kohanim*, to the parallel verse in Chronicles, where they are "first ministers of the king" (1 Chron. 18:17). 2 Kings 10:11 and Job 12:19 would seem to be other verses where *kohen* refers to a government official; note also the denominative verb in "like a bridegroom *adorned* with a turban" (Isa. 61:10), where the reference is to official but not necessarily religious garb.

[E] See Numbers 21. **[F]** Presumably Nahmanides is referring to the Vulgate, Jerome's Latin translation of the Bible.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS donkeys. Remember that horses were plentiful in Egypt. If everyone was allowed to ride them, it would be impossible to tell who was a noble and who was a slave. The same holds for the linen robes (Gersonides). Neither to do anything nor to go anywhere (Abarbanel).

45 Pharaoh then gave Joseph the name Zaphenath-paneah. Because Hebrew was hard for the Egyptians to pronounce (Bekhor Shor). Since Nebuchadnezzar named Daniel after his god, perhaps this was the name of Pharaoh's god (Gersonides). It was hard enough for the Egyptians to bear having a Hebrew rule over them, so he gave him an Egyptian name (Abarbanel). **And he gave him for a wife Asenath daughter of Poti-phera, priest of On**. Joseph in his wisdom arranged this himself. If Joseph or his sons were to fall from power, Potiphar or his sons might try to reclaim them as slaves if Joseph married someone else. By marrying Potiphar's daughter, Joseph ensured this would not happen. Potiphar would hardly wish his own daughter's children to be enslaved (Bekhor Shor). He also wanted to demonstrate that he had not slept with her mother. Another reading: She was really the daughter of Dinah by Shechem, who was adopted as a baby by Potiphar. Joseph married her once he realized who she was (Hizkuni). Having powerful Egyptian relatives would also help Joseph (Abarbanel). **Thus Joseph emerged in charge of the land of Egypt**. Literally, he "went out over the land of Egypt" (OJPS) in the chariot, demonstrating to everyone that he was now Pharaoh's second-in-command (Gersonides).

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NJPS the land of Egypt.—[46]Joseph was thirty years old when he entered the service of Pharaoh king of Egypt.—Leaving Pharaoh's presence, Joseph traveled through all the land of Egypt.

[47]During the seven years of plenty, the land produced in abundance. [48]And he gathered all the grain of the seven years that the land of Egypt was enjoying, and stored the grain in the cities; he put in each city the grain of the fields around it. [49]So Joseph collected produce in very large quantity, like the sands of the sea, until he ceased to measure it, for it could not be measured.

עַל־אֶ֥רֶץ מִצְרָֽיִם׃ 46 וְיוֹסֵ֗ף בֶּן־שְׁלֹשִׁ֤ים
שָׁנָה֙ בְּעָמְד֣וֹ לִפְנֵ֔י פַּרְעֹ֖ה מֶ֣לֶךְ־מִצְרָ֑יִם
וַיֵּצֵ֣א יוֹסֵ֗ף מִלִּפְנֵ֤י פַּרְעֹה֙ וַיַּעֲבֹ֔ר בְּכָל־אֶ֖רֶץ
מִצְרָֽיִם׃
47 וַתַּ֤עַשׂ הָאָ֙רֶץ֙ בְּשֶׁ֣בַע שְׁנֵ֣י הַשָּׂבָ֔ע
לְקֻמָצִֽים׃ 48 וַיִּקְבֹּ֞ץ אֶת־כָּל־אֹ֣כֶל ׀ שֶׁ֣בַע
שְׁנִ֗ים אֲשֶׁ֤ר הָיוּ֙ בְּאֶ֣רֶץ מִצְרַ֔יִם וַיִּתֵּ֥ן־אֹ֖כֶל
בֶּֽעָרִ֑ים אֹ֚כֶל שְׂדֵ֣ה־הָעִ֔יר אֲשֶׁ֥ר סְבִיבֹתֶ֖יהָ
נָתַ֥ן בְּתוֹכָֽהּ׃ 49 וַיִּצְבֹּ֥ר יוֹסֵ֛ף בָּ֖ר כְּחֹ֣ול הַיָּ֑ם
הַרְבֵּ֣ה מְאֹ֔ד עַ֚ד כִּי־חָדַ֣ל לִסְפֹּ֔ר כִּי־אֵ֥ין
מִסְפָּֽר׃

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ What is the real meaning of the word NJPS translates "in abundance" (v. 47) and OJPS "in heaps"?

RASHI **47 The land produced.** Literally, "made," as one "makes" money. As Onkelos translates, it was the inhabitants of the country who "collected" so much. **In abundance.** Literally, "by handfuls." They were piling it in the storehouses hand over fist.

48 He put in each city the grain of the fields around it. Each region would take its own produce and pack it in the local soil to keep it from rotting.

49 Until he ceased to measure it. More precisely, "until they left off numbering" (OJPS); Joseph was not doing the counting himself.

KIMHI **46 Leaving Pharaoh's presence.** Rather (using the same verb as in the previous verse) he "left" Pharaoh's presence, not being required to attend Pharaoh as the other officials were.

48 And stored the grain in the cities. The storehouses were in the cities, not in the villages where he collected the grain.

49 Like the sands of the sea. This is an exaggeration.

OJPS out over the land of Egypt.— [46]And Joseph was thirty years old when he stood before Pharaoh king of Egypt.—And Joseph went out from the presence of Pharaoh, and went throughout all the land of Egypt.

[47]And in the seven years of plenty the earth brought forth in heaps. [48]And he gathered up all the food of the seven years which were in the land of Egypt, and laid up the food in the cities; the food of the field, which was round about every city, laid he up in the same. [49]And Joseph laid up corn as the sand of the sea, very much, until they left off numbering; for it was without number.

RASHBAM **46 Joseph was thirty years old.** And therefore fit for power.

47 The land produced. Literally, it "made" a lot of produce: "it shall *yield* a crop sufficient for three years" (Lev. 25:21). **In abundance.** Literally, "by handfuls"—a handful of ears on a single stalk. That is how such abundance was produced.

IBN EZRA **48 And he gathered all the grain of the seven years.** Not literally "all" of it, obviously; otherwise they would have died of famine right then and there. As when "*all* the world came to Joseph" (v. 57), it is an exaggeration. He gathered as much grain as he could.

NAHMANIDES **47 In abundance.** Rashi understands the "heaps" (OJPS) to be "handfuls" of grain; but Onkelos takes them to be "storehouses," explaining the Hebrew, which literally means "diggings," as excavations made for underground storage (or any other purpose). Note "he who digs a *pit*" (Eccles. 10:8), where the word is *gummaẓ*, with *g* replacing the *k* of our word; for a similar interchange, compare "mixed wine" of Song 7:3 with "mixed the wine" of Prov. 9:2. **[G]**

48 And he gathered all the grain. He, Joseph; see v. 49. Ibn Ezra says that he cannot have gathered "all" the grain any more than "all" the world (v. 57) came to buy it. But I think Joseph actually did gather all the grain and then dispensed enough of it annually so that they could keep themselves alive but would not have any to waste. This is exactly what he had suggested in v. 35. Note, however, that our verse refers to "food" (OJPS), not "grain," referring to anything that people could eat, from grain or bread to figs and raisins.

49 So Joseph collected produce in very large quantity. This refers not to all kinds of food but specifically to "grain" (again, see OJPS). As previously specified, this was "collected under Pharaoh's authority" (v. 35) to be "winnowed with shovel and fan" (Isa. 30:24). "Food" (of all kinds) was stored in each city so that there would be enough produce everywhere. It was stored away for the years of famine, when as much as necessary could be retrieved to keep people alive. But whatever was left of the *grain* was kept "under Pharaoh's authority" (v. 35) and would remain in the storehouses. It could be that Joseph here is "collecting" the grain by paying for it (from the king's treasury) at a standard low price. That would explain why the grain later seems to belong to Pharaoh and is sold back to the people during the years of famine: "Joseph gathered in all the money that was to be found in the land of Egypt" (47:14). Alternatively, it could be

[G] We omit Nahmanides' many other examples of interchanges between ג, ב, and ק in the Bible and rabbinic literature.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **46 Joseph was thirty years old when he entered the service of Pharaoh king of Egypt.** This was another handicap he labored under; thirty was considered young for a ruler in those days (Abarbanel). **Joseph traveled through all the land of Egypt.** As in 1 Sam. 7:16, when Samuel "made the rounds of Bethel, Gilgal, and Mizpah, and acted as judge over Israel at all those places" (Sforno).

47 In abundance. The Hebrew word occurs in the plural only here (Masorah). I think these "handfuls" mean that each ear had a whole handful of grain on it—a bit of hyperbole (Gersonides). In fact this abundance was miraculously ordained, like the year before the last sabbatical year and the jubilee, when Lev. 25:21 tells us, "I will ordain My blessing for you in the sixth year, so that it shall yield a crop sufficient for three years" (Abarbanel).

48 He gathered all the grain of the seven years. All that he could gather after leaving them enough to eat and to plant (Gersonides). **And stored the grain in the cities.** So that the people would be more willing to give it up. Everyone prefers the food he is used to over food that he is unaccustomed to. That is why people like the food and the wine of their own localities (Gersonides). **He put in each city the grain of the fields around it.** But the grain from farther off was put in the royal storehouses, in the capital (Abarbanel).

49 It could not be measured. More hyperbole. It certainly could have been measured. But it would have been very difficult to do so (Gersonides).

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NJPS [50]Before the years of famine came, Joseph became the father of two sons, whom Asenath daughter of Poti-phera, priest of On, bore to him. [51]Joseph named the first-born Manasseh, meaning, "God has made me forget completely my hardship and my parental home." [52]And the second he named Ephraim, meaning, "God has made me fertile in the land of my affliction."

[53]The seven years of abundance that the land of Egypt enjoyed came to an end, [54]and the seven years of famine set in, just as Joseph had foretold. There was famine in all lands, but throughout the land of Egypt there was bread. [55]And when all the land of Egypt felt the hunger, the people cried out to Pharaoh for bread; and

50 וּלְיוֹסֵף יֻלַּד שְׁנֵי בָנִים בְּטֶרֶם תָּבוֹא
שְׁנַת הָרָעָב אֲשֶׁר יָלְדָה־לּוֹ אָסְנַת בַּת־
פּוֹטִי פֶרַע כֹּהֵן אוֹן׃ 51 וַיִּקְרָא יוֹסֵף אֶת־
שֵׁם הַבְּכֹר מְנַשֶּׁה כִּי־נַשַּׁנִי אֱלֹהִים אֶת־
כָּל־עֲמָלִי וְאֵת כָּל־בֵּית אָבִי׃ 52 וְאֵת שֵׁם
הַשֵּׁנִי קָרָא אֶפְרַיִם כִּי־הִפְרַנִי אֱלֹהִים
בְּאֶרֶץ עָנְיִי׃ רביעי
53 וַתִּכְלֶינָה שֶׁבַע שְׁנֵי הַשָּׂבָע אֲשֶׁר הָיָה
בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם׃ 54 וַתָּחֵלֶינָה שֶׁבַע שְׁנֵי
הָרָעָב לָבוֹא כַּאֲשֶׁר אָמַר יוֹסֵף וַיְהִי רָעָב
בְּכָל־הָאֲרָצוֹת וּבְכָל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם הָיָה
לָחֶם׃ 55 וַתִּרְעַב כָּל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם וַיִּצְעַק
הָעָם אֶל־פַּרְעֹה לַלָּחֶם וַיֹּאמֶר פַּרְעֹה

OJPS [50]And unto Joseph were born two sons before the year of famine came, whom Asenath the daughter of Poti-phera priest of On bore unto him. [51]And Joseph called the name of the first-born Manasseh: "for God hath made me forget all my toil, and all my father's house." [52]And the name of the second called he Ephraim: "for God hath made me fruitful in the land of my affliction."

[53]And the seven years of plenty, that was in the land of Egypt, came to an end. [54]And the seven years of famine began to come, according as Joseph had said; and there was famine in all lands; but in all the land of Egypt there was bread. [55]And when all the land of Egypt was famished, the people cried to Pharaoh for bread; and Pharaoh

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why does it matter that "Joseph became the father of two sons" *before* "the years of famine came" (v. 50)? ✦ Why are we told about Joseph's sons only now and not after his marriage in v. 45? ✦ How could "the people cry out to Pharaoh" (v. 55) when the seven years of plenty had just ended?

RASHI **50 Before the years of famine came.** We learn that people should not have sex during a famine.

55 And when all the land of Egypt felt the hunger. All the produce they had stored had rotted except for Joseph's. **Whatever he tells you, you shall do.** Joseph had told them to circumcise themselves, and they came to Pharaoh to complain about it. Said

KIMHI **50 Before the years of famine came.** Literally, "the year" of famine—the first year. They were born in the last year of plenty, making Joseph 37 when they were born; so they were 73 when Joseph died. **Joseph became the father of two sons.** The Hebrew awkwardly says something more like "two sons was born to him." The unusual singular verb may indicate that they were twins, two sons in a single birth. **Whom Asenath daughter of Poti-phera, priest of On, bore to him.** He had no other wife; she bore them both.

51 God has made me forget completely my hardship and my parental home. By giving me so much wealth and honor. As for the verb, despite the vowel, this is a Piel of נשה. But some think it comes from נשש.

52 God has made me fertile in the land of my affliction. In what was once the land of my affliction. But now God has made me fertile and given me wealth and honor.

53 The seven years of abundance that the land of Egypt enjoyed came to an end. Again the Hebrew uses a singular verb to treat the seven years as a single period of time: "the seven years . . . that *was* in the land of Egypt" (OJPS).

54 Throughout the land of Egypt there was bread. But in all the surrounding lands everyone had only what they had managed to store for themselves.

55 All the land of Egypt felt the hunger. Having finished what they had stored for themselves. They could not store enough for all seven years of the famine because of the fifth that they had to give to Pharaoh. **The people cried out to Pharaoh for bread.** They knew that Joseph had stored away the one-fifth so there would be grain that the people could buy to fulfill their needs.

NAHMANIDES that the king simply confiscated the grain, saying, "I am the one who preserved this food." Admittedly, Onkelos translates both "food" (v. 48) and "grain" (here) by the same word.

54 There was famine in all lands. All the lands around Egypt. What could the more distant lands do in a famine of this kind? Genesis Rabbah says explicitly that there was famine in *three* other lands: Phoenicia, Arabia, and Palestine.

RASHBAM **50 Before the years of famine came.** For Jacob came near the beginning of the famine, in the second year. Seventeen years later, as he was dying, he told Joseph, "your two sons, who were born to you in the land of Egypt before I came to you in Egypt, shall be mine; Ephraim and Manasseh shall be mine no less than Reuben and Simeon. But progeny born to you after them shall be yours" (48:5–6). So we are told here, in advance, that Ephraim and Manasseh were born before Jacob came to Egypt. Afterward, Joseph had other sons and grandsons who would be "recorded instead of their brothers in their inheritance" (48:6).

51 God has made me forget. "Forget" here is a geminate verb, from the root נשש; the *dagesh* in the ש indicates the doubling. If the root were נשה, as in "never forget Me" (Isa. 44:21) or "I forgot what happiness was" (Lam. 3:17), it would be *nishani*, not *nashani*.

54 But throughout the land of Egypt there was bread. Because Joseph had put food in the cities.

IBN EZRA **51 Meaning.** This word is not in the Hebrew (see OJPS). But that of course is the sense of the verse. **Forget.** Judah ibn Hayyuj, grammarian *par excellence*, says the root of this verb is נשש; but Moses Gikatilla says it is נשה.

54 Set in. This is definitely a geminate verb. **[C] In all lands.** In all the surrounding lands, all the lands in the vicinity of Egypt.

[C] In our texts, Ibn Ezra identifies it as a Qal, but this is most likely a scribal error; it is Hiphil.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **54 And the seven years of famine set in.** Rather, they "sickened" as the people grew ill from lack of food (Hizkuni).

55 The people cried out to Pharaoh for bread. But it was beneath the king's dignity to do the actual selling, so he sent them to Joseph (Hizkuni). During the good years, the Egyptians had sold grain to foreigners and made a killing; they were confident that the Nile would rise again next year and water the land. Now they wanted Pharaoh to decree, as countries do in times of famine, that no food could be exported (Abarbanel). **Go to Joseph; whatever he tells you, you shall do.** The text does not tell us what Joseph did in response to their request—because he did nothing (Abarbanel).

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NJPS Pharaoh said to all the Egyptians, "Go to Joseph; whatever he tells you, you shall do."—[56]Accordingly, when the famine became severe in the land of Egypt, Joseph laid open all that was within, and rationed out grain to the Egyptians. The famine, however, spread over the whole world. [57]So all the world came to Joseph in Egypt to procure rations, for the famine had become severe throughout the world.

OJPS said unto all the Egyptians: "Go unto Joseph; what he saith to you, do." [56]And the famine was over all the face of the earth; and Joseph opened all the storehouses, and sold unto the Egyptians; and the famine was sore in the land of Egypt. [57]And all countries came into Egypt to Joseph to buy corn; because the famine was sore in all the earth.

לְכָל־מִצְרַיִם לְכוּ אֶל־יוֹסֵף אֲשֶׁר־יֹאמַר לָכֶם תַּעֲשׂוּ׃ [56] וְהָרָעָב הָיָה עַל כָּל־פְּנֵי הָאָרֶץ וַיִּפְתַּח יוֹסֵף אֶת־כָּל־אֲשֶׁר בָּהֶם וַיִּשְׁבֹּר לְמִצְרַיִם וַיֶּחֱזַק הָרָעָב בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם׃ [57] וְכָל־הָאָרֶץ בָּאוּ מִצְרַיְמָה לִשְׁבֹּר אֶל־יוֹסֵף כִּי־חָזַק הָרָעָב בְּכָל־הָאָרֶץ׃

42 When Jacob saw that there were food rations to be had in Egypt, he said to

מב וַיַּרְא יַעֲקֹב כִּי יֶשׁ־שֶׁבֶר בְּמִצְרָיִם וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב לְבָנָיו לָמָּה

RASHI Pharaoh, "Why did you not collect grain? He told you that years of famine were coming." They replied, "We gathered a lot, but it rotted." Pharaoh said, "Then you must do whatever he tells you. He decreed that the grain should rot, and it did; what if he decrees that *we* should die?"

56 All that was within. More precisely, as Onkelos explains, "all that had [grain] within them." **And rationed out grain to the Egyptians.** The Hebrew verb means "to do business" and can refer either to buying or to selling; here, of course, to selling. In "Go again and *procure* some food for us" (43:2) the same verb implies buying. Do not think it can be used only with grain: "*Buy* food without money, wine and milk without cost" (Isa. 55:1). **The famine, however, spread over the whole world.** This translates the *beginning* of the Hebrew verse, which (however) is better translated, "the famine was over all the face of the land" (compare OJPS). And who is "the face of the land"? The rich.

57 So all the world came to Joseph in Egypt to procure rations. **[C]**

42:1 When Jacob saw that there were food rations to be had in Egypt. How did he "see" this? He didn't *see* it, he heard it! See v. 2. So why does our verse say "see"? He saw in a holy vision that there was some "hope" for him in Egypt (reading שבר not as

[C] In Hebrew, "to Joseph" comes at the end of this clause; both translations follow Rashi's comment and move it up for clarity.

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why must we be told that "Jacob saw that there were food rations to be had in Egypt" (v. 1)? Wouldn't this have been obvious to everyone? Egypt is a big country and always produced a certain amount of grain, all the more so during those seven years of plenty.

RASHBAM **56 And rationed out grain to the Egyptians.** The Hebrew verb is used for purchasing food and drink; see Isa. 55:1.

42:1 Why do you keep looking at one another? The same verb is used when Amaziah sends envoys to King Jehoash of Israel: "Come, let us *confront* each other" (2 Kings 14:8). He had emboldened himself to demonstrate his greatness to Jehoash. Here, too, what Jacob is really saying is,

IBN EZRA **56 Joseph laid open all that was within.** Rather, "all the storehouses" (OJPS) that were "among them." **And rationed out grain.** The sense is that he "sold" it to them (OJPS).

42:1 Jacob saw that there were food rations to be had. Since all the senses are concentrated in a single place, they can interchange: "*See,* the *smell* of my son is like the smell of the fields" (27:27); "how *sweet* is the *light*" (Eccles. 11:7). Here, too, we are

KIMHI **56 Joseph laid open all that was within.** He opened the storehouses "within which" there was grain. **And rationed out grain to the Egyptians.** He first sold only to Egyptians until the other countries realized that there was grain in Egypt, at which point the famine became severe in Egypt because people from all over the world were coming to buy grain. Grain sales were strictly rationed because people were coming from all over the world to buy, and because the famine was expected to last so long. The verb "to ration out grain" derives from the noun "grain," which in turn is called *shever* because it is what *shavar* ("broke") the famine. Compare the use of this verb in "the wild asses *slake* their thirst" (Ps. 104:11). The verb describes a single activity in which both a buyer and a seller participate.

42:1 Jacob saw that there were food rations to be had in Egypt. He saw the local people coming back with grain and asked them where they were bringing it from. They told him, "From Egypt." That is what he "heard" (v. 2).

NAHMANIDES **56 Accordingly, when the famine became severe in the land of Egypt, Joseph laid open all that was within, and rationed out grain to the Egyptians.** See the actual Hebrew word order in OJPS: "Joseph opened all the storehouses, and sold unto the Egyptians; and the famine was sore in the land of Egypt." But NJPS correctly observes that Joseph did not open the storehouses immediately when "the people cried out to Pharaoh" (v. 55), but waited until the famine in the land became severe. For the people would start crying out when they still had something left, and Joseph did not want to distribute anything from the storehouses until they had nothing left at all. That is why he waited until "the famine was over all the face of the land [of Egypt]" (see the beginning of the verse in OJPS; but both translations misunderstand this phrase). The verse is emphasizing that Joseph did not begin to sell grain until the famine was extremely severe. Or perhaps it is exaggerating by suggesting that he did not sell grain until the entire country was in a panic.

42:1 Why do you keep looking at one another? See Rashi's comment. What the "others" he mentions said is worthless, but I do not understand Rashi's own point either. The sons of Ishmael and of Esau were not living in Canaan at this point, so why would Jacob mention them rather than the local Canaanites? Perhaps the sons of Ishmael and Esau were coming through Canaan on their way to buy grain from Joseph, and Jacob was afraid that if his sons looked well fed their cousins would expect to be able to stop by his house and

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **56 Joseph laid open all that was within.** To demonstrate that he would be able to support them (Sforno).

57 So all the world came to Joseph in Egypt to procure rations. He was the only one who was selling (Abarbanel).

42:1 Jacob saw. That is, he "heard" (v. 2), as in Exod. 20:15, when "the people saw the thunder" (Hizkuni). **Why do you keep looking at one another?** Rather, "Why do you *show yourselves* [darkened by famine]?" Compare Song 1:6, "Don't *stare* at me because

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NJPS his sons, "Why do you keep looking at one another? [2]Now I hear," he went on, "that there are rations to be had in Egypt. Go down and procure rations for us there, that we may live and not die." [3]So ten of Joseph's brothers went down to get grain rations in Egypt; [4]for Jacob did not send Joseph's brother Benjamin with his brothers, since he feared that he might meet with disaster. [5]Thus the sons of Israel were among those who came to procure rations, for the famine extended to the land of Canaan.

OJPS "Why do ye look one upon another?" [2]And he said: "Behold, I have heard that there is corn in Egypt. Get you down thither, and buy for us from thence; that we may live, and not die." [3]And Joseph's ten brethren went down to buy corn from Egypt. [4]But Benjamin, Joseph's brother, Jacob sent not with his brethren; for he said: "Lest peradventure harm befall him." [5]And the sons of Israel came to buy among those that came; for the famine was in the land of Canaan.

תִּתְרָאוּ׃ 2 וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּה שָׁמַעְתִּי כִּי יֶשׁ־
שֵׁבֶר בְּמִצְרָיִם רְדוּ־שָׁמָּה וְשִׁבְרוּ־לָנוּ
מִשָּׁם וְנִחְיֶה וְלֹא נָמוּת׃ 3 וַיֵּרְדוּ אֲחֵי־יוֹסֵף
עֲשָׂרָה לִשְׁבֹּר בָּר מִמִּצְרָיִם׃ 4 וְאֶת־בִּנְיָמִין
אֲחִי יוֹסֵף לֹא־שָׁלַח יַעֲקֹב אֶת־אֶחָיו כִּי
אָמַר פֶּן־יִקְרָאֶנּוּ אָסוֹן׃ 5 וַיָּבֹאוּ בְּנֵי
יִשְׂרָאֵל לִשְׁבֹּר בְּתוֹךְ הַבָּאִים כִּי־הָיָה
הָרָעָב בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן׃

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why were Joseph's brothers "looking at one another"? ✦ How did Jacob "hear" (v. 2) that there were rations to be had in Egypt? ✦ Why did "ten of Joseph's brothers" (v. 3) have to go down to Egypt? The text explains why Benjamin did not go, but wouldn't two or three brothers have been enough?

RASHI *shever* but as *sever*)—but it was not so actually prophetic as to let him know for certain that this hope was Joseph. **Why do you keep looking at one another?** "Do not *make yourselves look* to the sons of Ishmael and of Esau as if you had *eaten your fill*." For at that time they did still have grain. The verb is not about "seeing" but is related to the forms in "He who *satisfies* others shall himself be *sated*" (Prov. 11:25). But I have heard others say that it means "why must you look so lean [from hunger]?"

2 Go down. He says "go down" and not just "go" to hint at the 210 years they would be enslaved in Egypt; **[D]** 210 is the numerical value of the Hebrew word that means "go down."

3 So ten of Joseph's brothers went down. They are called "Joseph's brothers" here to indicate that they regretted selling him and had decided to treat him with brotherly love and buy him out of slavery no matter what the cost. But since v. 4 tells us Benjamin did not go, why must our verse say explicitly that they were "ten"? With regard to their relationship with Joseph, there were still 10 different opinions among them; only about getting grain were they united and acting as one.

4 Since he feared that he might meet with disaster. Could no disaster happen to him at home? Said R. Eliezer b. Jacob: We learn from this that the Accuser files charges when one puts oneself in a position of danger.

5 Among those who came. Hiding themselves among the crowd so as not to be recognized. Their father had warned them not to

[D] According to rabbinic tradition.

RASHBAM "Why are you putting up a front toward the people who actually do have all the grain they need? You are lingering here when you have no grain! Everyone else is going down to Egypt to buy grain, but you sit here and pretend that you already have some."

IBN EZRA told first that Jacob *saw* that there was food in Egypt and immediately afterward that he "heard" it (v. 2). **Why do you keep looking at one another?** Rather, "Why are you *making yourselves look* that way?—as if you had plenty." Or perhaps it means, "Why do you keep *confronting* one another?" as this verb is used in "Come, let us *confront* each other!" (2 Chron. 25:17).

2 Procure rations for us. Here the same verb used in 41:56 for selling grain is used for buying it.

4 That he might meet with disaster. Death.

KIMHI **3 So ten of Joseph's brothers went down.** They are "Joseph's brothers" here, not "Jacob's sons," because it is as Joseph's brothers that they are going to Egypt, in fulfillment of his dream.

4 Joseph's brother Benjamin. His full brother, from the same mother. **Since he feared that he might meet with disaster.** As Joseph had, whether at human hands or at the hands of heaven. But why was Jacob more afraid of a disaster striking him on the road than at home? Because traveling is always more dangerous.

5 The sons of Israel were among those who came to procure rations. They were not kept separate because they were

NAHMANIDES eat. But if that is so, "that we may live and not die" (v. 2) is a separate line of reasoning: they should be cautious with the little grain they had and go down to Egypt to get more before what they had was completely used up. The correct interpretation, however, is that Jacob is telling them, "Do not show yourselves in this place any longer." For they should have gone down to Egypt the moment they heard there was food there. They were already in danger if they did not hurry.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS I am swarthy" (Bekhor Shor). The same root is used in Prov. 11:25 to mean "sated"; it is a contronym, like "root" and "uproot" (Hizkuni). It could mean, as Ibn Ezra suggests, "Why do you keep *confronting* one another?" For each of them wanted to take whatever grain was left to feed his own family. But I think it is more correct to take it as "Why do you keep showing yourselves," making yourselves conspicuous searching for food among the Canaanites. Aren't you afraid the localities around Shechem will take revenge on you? Stop showing yourselves around Canaan and go down to Egypt (Gersonides). "Why are you showing off?" His sons were too proud to go down to Egypt, and bought grain at a high price from those who had gone down to Egypt to get it. Jacob asked them, "Why do you act as if money is no object?" (Abarbanel). Why do you keep looking at each other waiting for someone else to go down and get food for you? (Sforno).

2 Now I hear that there are rations to be had in Egypt. Rather, "I have heard" (OJPS) that when there is famine elsewhere, there is grain in Egypt. — Indeed, we find Abraham and Isaac following the same instinct (Bekhor Shor). **That we may live and not die.** Even if we cannot eat our fill, at least we will not starve to death (Sforno).

3 So ten of Joseph's brothers went down to get grain rations in Egypt. They would not have sold one of them grain for all 10; they sold to each customer only enough for his own family, to prevent dealers from speculating in grain, as usually happens during a famine (Sforno).

5 Thus the sons of Israel were among those who came to procure rations. They concealed themselves among them, following

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NJPS 6Now Joseph was the vizier of the land; it was he who dispensed rations to all the people of the land. And Joseph's brothers came and bowed low to him, with their faces to the ground. 7When Joseph saw his brothers, he recognized them; but he acted like a stranger toward them and spoke harshly to them. He asked them, "Where do you come from?" And they said, "From the land of Canaan, to procure food." 8For though Joseph

OJPS 6And Joseph was the governor over the land; he it was that sold to all the people of the land. And Joseph's brethren came, and bowed down to him with their faces to the earth. 7And Joseph saw his brethren, and he knew them, but made himself strange unto them, and spoke roughly with them; and he said unto them: "Whence come ye?" And they said: "From the land of Canaan to buy food." 8And Joseph knew

6 וְיוֹסֵף֙ הוּא֙ הַשַּׁלִּ֣יט עַל־הָאָ֔רֶץ הוּא֙ הַמַּשְׁבִּ֔יר לְכָל־עַ֖ם הָאָ֑רֶץ וַיָּבֹ֣אוּ׀ אֲחֵ֣י יוֹסֵ֗ף וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲווּ־לוֹ֙ אַפַּ֣יִם אָ֔רְצָה׃ 7 וַיַּרְא֙ יוֹסֵ֣ף אֶת־אֶחָ֔יו וַיַּכִּרֵ֑ם וַיִּתְנַכֵּ֤ר אֲלֵיהֶם֙ וַיְדַבֵּ֣ר אִתָּ֔ם קָשׁ֖וֹת וַיֹּ֣אמֶר אֲלֵהֶ֑ם מֵאַ֣יִן בָּאתֶ֔ם וַיֹּ֣אמְרוּ֔ מֵאֶ֥רֶץ כְּנַ֖עַן לִשְׁבָּר־אֹֽכֶל׃ 8 וַיַּכֵּ֥ר יוֹסֵ֖ף אֶת־אֶחָ֑יו וְהֵ֖ם לֹ֥א הִכִּרֻֽהוּ׃

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why did Joseph "act like a stranger" toward his brothers and "speak harshly to them" (v. 7)? Was he still seeking revenge all these years later?

RASHI show themselves together at a single entry point but to each enter separately. They were handsome, strong men, and he did not want the evil eye to have power over them.

6 Joseph's brothers came and bowed low to him. Not just "low" but "with their faces to the earth" (OJPS). The Hebrew verb refers to stretching one's arms and legs out prone on the ground.

7 He acted like a stranger toward them. By the way he spoke, addressing them harshly and as if he were foreign to them.

8 Joseph recognized his brothers. They were already bearded when he left

RASHBAM **7 Where do you come from?** He does not ask, "*Why* have you come?" He was pretending not to know them.

8 They did not recognize him. For by

IBN EZRA **6 It was he who dispensed rations.** Again, the Hebrew is a verb: "It was he who rationed" all the people—that is, sold grain to them.

7 But he acted like a stranger toward them. As in v. 1, the Hitpael means making oneself out to be something, in this case a stranger. **Spoke harshly to them.** The Hebrew uses an adjective: "He spoke harsh [words] to them." You will find the same syntax (with a different Hebrew word) in "the rich man's answer is harsh" (Prov. 18:23).

8 Joseph recognized his brothers. In v. 7, "he recognized *them*" as his brothers;

KIMHI Hebrews. Great numbers came down, and they were among them.

6 Now Joseph was the vizier of the land; it was he who dispensed rations. He had commanded that everyone who wanted rations should first come before him to request permission to buy. He knew that there was famine in Canaan and that his brothers would come down, and he wanted to make sure that when they came down they would have to appear before him—which indeed happened.

7 He acted like a stranger toward them and spoke harshly to them. All to prevent them from realizing that he was Joseph.

8 They did not recognize him. They might have recognized him even despite the fact that he now had a beard had they not seen

NAHMANIDES **6 It was he who dispensed rations to all the people of the land.** It is obviously not right that the king's second-in-command should be selling grain on a retail basis to all comers—a bushel to this one and a half bushel to that. Our Sages, therefore, were moved to declare that Joseph must have ordered all the storehouses but one closed at this point. A more straightforward reading of the text might be that people from all the various countries were coming before Joseph, who was researching their needs; he would instruct the overseers to sell certain amounts of such-and-such varieties to the people of particular cities. The sons of Jacob, therefore, had to come before Joseph, like anyone else who came down from Canaan, for him to establish what they were going to be allowed to buy. They were in fact the first to come from there, so they went before him as the representatives of Canaan.

7 When Joseph saw his brothers, he recognized them. Immediately—and he was afraid they might recognize him. **He acted like a stranger toward them.** Rather, he "made himself strange" (OJPS), that is, he disguised himself, pulling his turban down over his forehead and partly over his face. Compare the episode where Jeroboam told his wife, "Go and *disguise yourself*" (1 Kings 14:2), and the Holy One told Abijah, "She will *be in disguise*" (1 Kings 14:5). Or it may be that he "acted like a stranger" by speaking harshly and angrily to them, as if people were not supposed to be allowed in to buy grain directly from him. Rashi thinks Joseph is speaking "like a foreigner"; he has not understood this point. **Where do you come from?** How did you get in here?!

8 For though Joseph recognized his brothers. Rather, "Joseph recognized his brothers"; "for though" is not in the Hebrew. It was

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS their father's instructions in v. 1 not to "show" themselves (Hizkuni). Everyone traveled in convoys so they could defend themselves against the bandits who had grown numerous because of the famine (Sforno).

6 Now Joseph was the vizier of the land; it was he who dispensed rations. Even though Joseph was the vizier, nonetheless it was he who dispensed rations. Pharaoh had a lot of money coming to him from these sales, so no grain could be dispensed without Joseph's seal or signature (Sforno).

7 When Joseph saw his brothers, he recognized them. He had been expecting them to come down to Egypt because of the famine, as the Patriarchs did (Bekhor Shor). **But he acted like a stranger toward them.** So many people were coming down from Canaan that he was afraid someone might recognize him. He did not want to reveal himself to them, treat them well, and open himself to the charge that he was sending the king's money out of the country to Canaan. And if war should break out between Egypt and Canaan Joseph would have been in great danger. He needed a way to bring his brothers and father down to live in Egypt. But he was still afraid his brothers hated him and might try to kill him. So he wanted to test them to see whether the intervening 22 years had changed them (Abarbanel). He did not speak humbly as he usually did (Sforno). **And spoke harshly to them.** "Harshly" occurs nowhere else in the Bible but here and in v. 30 (Masorah). When one of them asked him for grain to buy, he snapped, "I have no time! I won't sell you any grain! Why are you always shouting at me?" The other brothers asked, "Why won't you sell us any grain? Why are you upset with us?" Joseph replied, "Why are you speaking up for him? Are you all spies?" (Bekhor Shor). They deserved no punishment for what they had *done*, since God achieved good for them and for him through the sale. But they did deserve some punishment for their evil *intent* (Abarbanel). He changed his voice so they would not recognize it (Sforno).

8 Joseph recognized his brothers. He not only understood their language but heard them calling each other by name (Hizkuni).

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NJPS recognized his brothers, they did not recognize him. [9]Recalling the dreams that he had dreamed about them, Joseph said to them, "You are spies, you have come to see the land in its

OJPS his brethren, but they knew him not. [9]And Joseph remembered the dreams which he dreamed of them, and said unto them: "Ye are spies; to see the nakedness of the land ye are

RASHI them. **They did not recognize him.** He had not yet been bearded when he left them, but now he was. A midrash: When they were put in his power, he recognized them as his brothers and took pity on them; but when he had been in their power, they had not recognized him as their brother and not taken pity on him.

9 The dreams that he had dreamed about them. And he realized that the dreams had come to pass—for they had bowed down to him. **The land in its nakedness.** To uncover where it would be easiest to conquer: "If a man lies with a woman in her infirmity and uncovers her *nakedness*, he has *laid bare* her flow" (Lev. 20:18); "naked and *bare*" (Ezek. 16:7). "Naked" means "uncovered." Onkelos translates "the weak points of the land," but he is paraphrasing.

9 וַיִּזְכֹּר יוֹסֵף אֶת הַחֲלֹמוֹת אֲשֶׁר חָלַם
לָהֶם וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם מְרַגְּלִים אַתֶּם לִרְאוֹת

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why must we be told a second time that "Joseph recognized his brothers" but "they did not recognize him" (v. 8)? ✦ What was it about "recalling the dreams" that led Joseph to say to his brothers, "You are spies" (v. 9)? ✦ How did Joseph dare to make this accusation publicly without any kind of proof?

RASHBAM now he had a full beard. Moreover, they saw him wearing royal raiment and governing an entire kingdom. They did not recognize his voice because he was speaking to them through a translator (see v. 23).

9 You are spies. They were men of stature, and the 10 of them always stayed together in one group. They never separated from each other, as was normal for those who came from elsewhere to buy grain. **In its nakedness.** The breaches in the walls and the places where it would be easiest to conquer: "*Raze* it from foundation to top" (Hab. 3:13); "*Strip her, strip her* to her very foundations!" (Ps. 137:7).

KIMHI him garbed in such splendor. It was too far-fetched to imagine that Joseph, whom they had sold as a slave, was now the lord of Egypt. They thought, "He certainly does resemble Joseph. But lots of people look alike."

9 Recalling the dreams that he had dreamed about them. He realized, now, that the dreams had been about them, and that they had hated him for them. Despite what they had done to him, he did not repay their evil. He merely wanted to provoke and annoy them.

IBN EZRA now, he recognized each one of them individually. ("Though" is not in the Hebrew; compare OJPS.)

9 The land in its nakedness. His metaphor is based on the custom of hiding nakedness as something indecent. Or perhaps, since nakedness is customarily hidden, he meant, "You have come to spy out the secrets of the land." And that is the correct understanding, in my view.

NAHMANIDES only when they replied to his question by saying "from the land of Canaan, to procure food" (v. 7) that he recognized for certain that they were his brothers. **They did not recognize him.** At all. He did not have to disguise himself any longer. Since Issachar and Zebulun were barely older than Joseph, they (like him) would not have had beards when he knew them; but once he recognized the older boys he recognized them too. And of course he was expecting them to come down, while it never crossed their minds that the boy they had sold to the Ishmaelites as a slave might now be the grand vizier. (And see Ibn Ezra's comment.)

9 Recalling the dreams that he had dreamed about them. It seems to me that this verse is telling us exactly the opposite of what Rashi thinks. What Joseph realizes is that not even the first dream has yet come to pass. For in the very first dream, when "we were binding sheaves in the field" and "your sheaves gathered around and bowed low to my sheaf" (37:7), presumably "we" meant that all 11 of his brothers bowed to him. And the second dream had "the sun, the moon, and eleven stars" (37:9). Not seeing Benjamin with them, he devised a plan to make them bring him down as well, in order to fulfill the first dream first. That is why he did not want to tell them, "I am your brother Joseph! Hurry back to my father!" nor to send the wagons and so forth as he eventually did. For his father would undoubtedly have hurried down. But once the first dream was finally fulfilled, he did tell them who he was, in order to fulfill the second dream. Had it not been for this, it would have been a great sin for Joseph to put his father through such pain for so long, bereaving him not only of himself but also of Simeon. Even if he did want to irritate his brothers a little bit, how could he not take pity on his elderly father? But in fact he brought "everything to pass precisely at its time" (Eccles. 3:11) in order to fulfill the dreams, which he knew must certainly come to pass. Even the incident with the goblet was not done to hurt them. He suspected they might hate Benjamin out of jealousy of their father's love for him, just as they had previously with him. Or perhaps he thought that Benjamin suspected they had been involved in Joseph's disappearance, which might have given rise to enmity between him and the rest of the brothers. So he did not want Benjamin traveling with them until he had made certain of their love for him. The remark in Genesis Rabbah that what Judah says in 44:16 was meant to reconcile the brothers is directed along similar lines. So I too say: Everything that Joseph is doing here is to make sure the dreams will come to pass as they were supposed to. Otherwise it would simply be incredible for Joseph to rise to power in Egypt and not send his father a note all these years. Egypt is only six days' travel from Hebron, and if it were a year's travel he still ought to have done it out of respect for his father. And Jacob would have paid whatever price was demanded for Joseph, no matter how high. But Joseph realized that the dreams of his brothers and his father and the whole family bowing down to him could never come to pass in their land. He hoped that they *could* come to pass in Egypt, once his father was able to witness his great success personally. When he heard Pharaoh's dreams, he understood immediately that they would all come down to Egypt and his dreams would indeed be fulfilled. **Joseph said to them, "You are spies."** He had to pretend there was some rhyme or reason behind this accusation; they had done nothing to deserve it, and the whole world was coming down to Egypt to buy grain, the brothers among them. But perhaps he saw that they were distinguished-looking men, "all of them clothed in splendor" (Ezek. 38:4), and said, "Why are men like you here buying grain? Your kind has servants to take care of that sort of

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **9 Recalling the dreams that he had dreamed about them.** He wanted to make sure they would all come and bow to him in order to fulfill the moment when his own sheaf "stood up and remained upright" (37:7). For he knew this portended that one day, as Hosea 2:2 tells us, "the people of Judah and the people of Israel shall assemble together and appoint one head over them; and they shall rise from the ground" (Sforno). **You are spies.** "I know what you are like." They had once accused him of spying on them, and now he turned the same suspicion back on them (Abarbanel). **You have come to see the land in its nakedness.** This is not redundant. "You are spies" by profession and have now come "to see the land in its nakedness" on this particular occasion (Abarbanel). To see whether we have enough food to feed ourselves (Sforno).

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NJPS nakedness." [10]But they said to him, "No, my lord! Truly, your servants have come to procure food. [11]We are all of us sons of the same man; we are honest men; your servants have never been spies!" [12]And he said to them, "No, you have come to see the land in its nakedness!" [13]And they replied, "We your servants were twelve brothers, sons of a certain man in the land of Canaan; the youngest, however, is now with our father, and one is no

אֶת־עֶרְוַ֥ת הָאָ֖רֶץ בָּאתֶֽם׃ 10 וַיֹּאמְר֥וּ אֵלָ֖יו
לֹ֣א אֲדֹנִ֑י וַעֲבָדֶ֙יךָ֙ בָּ֣אוּ לִשְׁבָּר־אֹ֔כֶל׃
11 כֻּלָּ֞נוּ בְּנֵ֣י אִישׁ־אֶחָ֗ד נֶאֱמָנִ֙ים֙ בְּנֵ֣ינוּ אֲנַ֔חְנוּ
לֹֽא־הָי֥וּ עֲבָדֶ֖יךָ מְרַגְּלִֽים׃ 12 וַיֹּ֥אמֶר אֲלֵהֶ֖ם
לֹ֑א כִּֽי־עֶרְוַ֥ת הָאָ֖רֶץ בָּאתֶ֥ם לִרְאֽוֹת׃
13 וַיֹּאמְר֗וּ שְׁנֵ֨ים עָשָׂר֜ עֲבָדֶ֣יךָ אַחִ֗ים |
אֲנַ֨חְנוּ בְּנֵ֤י אִישׁ־אֶחָד֙ בְּאֶ֣רֶץ כְּנָ֔עַן
וְהִנֵּ֥ה הַקָּטֹ֖ן אֶת־אָבִ֑ינוּ הַיּ֣וֹם וְהָאֶחָ֔ד

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ How is "We are all of us sons of the same man" (v. 11) supposed to refute the accusation of being spies? That only makes them more suspicious! ✦ Why did they say, "We are honest men," once they had already explained that they had "come to procure food" (v. 10)? ✦ Why did the brothers say, "Your servants have never been spies," without responding to Joseph's other accusation, that they had come "to see the land in its nakedness" (v. 9)? ✦ If the two accusations are identical, why was it necessary to say both? ✦ Why does Joseph not respond to the brothers' reply but merely repeat, "No, you have come to see the land in its nakedness!" (v. 12)? ✦ How does "We your servants were twelve brothers" (v. 13) respond to the accusation any better than what they have already said?

RASHI **10 No, my lord!** Do not say that.

11 We are all of us sons of the same man. The Holy Spirit blossomed in them, causing them unwittingly to include him in "all of us" along with them. For he too was their father's son. **We are honest men.** We are speaking truly. — Compare "You have spoken *rightly*" (Exod. 10:29); "The plea of Zelophehad's daughters is *just*" (Num. 27:7).

12 No, you have come to see the land in its nakedness! You came into the city via 10 different gates. Why didn't you all come in at the same time, via the same gate?

13 One is no more. And we spread out to look all over the city for the one who "is no more."

KIMHI **10 Truly, your servants have come to procure food.** Rather, "*but* your servants have come to procure food" (see OJPS). The conjunction *vav* can sometimes indicate contrast (e.g., in Ps. 7:5); for more on this, see the grammatical section of my *Sefer Mikhlol*.

13 We your servants were twelve brothers, sons of a certain man. Sons of "one man" (OJPS). Once again they are trying to impress upon him that the fact that they are always together is not conspiratorial; they are a family. **One is no more.** They said it in this ambiguous way because if they said he was dead he might be able to accuse them of lying. They had no idea whether he was alive or dead. But they knew he had been sold in Egypt

OJPS come." [10]And they said unto him: "Nay, my lord, but to buy food are thy servants come. [11]We are all one man's sons; we are upright men, thy servants are no spies." [12]And he said unto them: "Nay, but to see the nakedness of the land ye are come." [13]And they said: "We thy servants are twelve brethren, the sons of one man in the land of Canaan; and, behold, the youngest is this day with our father, and

RASHBAM **11 We are all of us sons of the same man.** That is why we stay together—not because we are spies with some nefarious plan.

12 No, you have come to see the land in its nakedness! If all of you are really sons of the same man, how is it that not one of you stayed behind with your father? — He wanted to know whether Benjamin was still alive. This explains why they tell him in v. 13 that they were "twelve brothers," and what they meant when they told Jacob, "The man kept asking about us and our family" (43:7).

IBN EZRA **11 We.** They say *naḥnu* rather than the standard *anaḥnu*, dropping the א at the beginning of the word—and that is the original form. **We are honest men.** We are trustworthy. The Hebrew adjective is related to an adverb, as used in "Do *so*, as you have said" (18:5) or perhaps as used in "The daughters of Zelophehad speak *right*" (Num. 27:7), that is, they speak the truth.

NAHMANIDES thing." And if they were indeed the first to come from Canaan, he could easily say, "You are spies! Not one man has come down to me from Canaan to buy grain." That is why he started by asking them, "Where do you come from?" (v. 7).

11 We are all of us sons of the same man. Perhaps they mean to explain why they all came as a group, rather than just one of them with a group of servants. And it was quite true. Why would Jacob send them all? But they really did not want to be apart from each other. They may also have been worried, because of the severity of the famine, that their servants might be robbed of the rations on their way home. They may also have meant to say, "You can easily check on us. Our father is quite well known where we come from, because of 'his great wealth and his many sons' [Esther 5:11]. If you investigate, you will certainly discover that we are honest men, righteous sons of a righteous father, and not spies." **Your servants have never been spies!** We are honest in all our dealings and have been so since we were young. — See similarly v. 31. The Sages were aware of this problem and explained that the 10 men entered the city through 10 different gates as spies might. This assertion is no doubt correct, but the text does not say anything about it. Moreover, if it were true that they entered the city separately, then telling Joseph that they were all "sons of the same man" would be enough to convict them. (The next two verses continue this episode. The text did not bother to explain it in full.)

12 No, you have come to see the land in its nakedness! If you are really brothers, you ought to have all come in through the same gate.

13 We your servants were twelve brothers . . . and one is no more. So we entered the city through different gates in search of him.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **11 We are all of us sons of the same man.** I learned the following interpretation from my father and teacher, may he rest in Paradise: Spies live their lives in profound danger, always on the brink of death. A man might let one or two of his sons become spies, but not ten (Gersonides). If we were here as spies, we would have been sent by a king, who would certainly not have picked 10 brothers for the mission (Sforno). **We are honest men.** In all our dealings (Sforno).

12 No, you have come to see the land in its nakedness! How did Joseph know they had entered the city separately? He had ordered that no one be allowed in without giving his name, his father's name, and his grandfather's name. When the gatekeepers brought that day's records to Joseph, he realized that his brothers had come—and each through a different gate (Hizkuni). You say that no one would let 10 of his sons become spies—but your father may have many more sons at home (Gersonides). You are telling me that one man had 10 sons? A lie like that totally convinces me that you have come to see the land in its nakedness. You did not come "to procure food"—that is just a cover story (Abarbanel). No, you are not brothers—that is your cover story (Sforno).

13 We your servants were twelve brothers, sons of a certain man in the land of Canaan. In fact, there are not 10 of us, but 12, all the sons of "one man" (OJPS), but not all of one woman (Abarbanel). You can investigate all these details, which will confirm that we

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NJPS more." 14But Joseph said to them, "It is just as I have told you: You are spies! 15By this you shall be put to the test: unless your youngest brother comes here, by Pharaoh, you shall not depart from this place! 16Let one of you go and bring your brother, while the rest of you remain confined, that your words may be put to the test whether there is truth in you. Else, by Pharaoh, you are nothing but spies!" 17And he confined them in the guardhouse for three days.

18On the third day Joseph said to them, "Do this and you shall live, for I am a God-fearing man. 19If you are honest men, let one of you brothers be held in your place of detention, while the rest of you go and take home rations for your starving households; 20but you must bring your youngest brother back to me. Then your words will be confirmed and you will not die." They agreed to do so.

OJPS one is not." 14And Joseph said unto them: "That is it that I spoke unto you, saying: Ye are spies. 15Hereby ye shall be proved, as Pharaoh liveth, ye shall not go forth hence, except your youngest brother come hither. 16Send one of you, and let him fetch your brother, and ye shall be bound, that your words may be proved, whether there be truth in you; or else, as Pharaoh liveth, surely ye are spies." 17And he put them all together into ward three days.

18And Joseph said unto them the third day. "This do, and live; for I fear God: 19if ye be upright men, let one of your brethren

אֵינֶנּוּ׃ 14 וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם יוֹסֵף הוּא אֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתִּי אֲלֵכֶם לֵאמֹר מְרַגְּלִים אַתֶּם׃ 15 בְּזֹאת תִּבָּחֲנוּ חֵי פַּרְעֹה אִם־תֵּצְאוּ מִזֶּה כִּי אִם־בְּבוֹא אֲחִיכֶם הַקָּטֹן הֵנָּה׃ 16 שִׁלְחוּ מִכֶּם אֶחָד וְיִקַּח אֶת־אֲחִיכֶם וְאַתֶּם הֵאָסְרוּ וְיִבָּחֲנוּ דִּבְרֵיכֶם הֲאֶמֶת אִתְּכֶם וְאִם־לֹא חֵי פַּרְעֹה כִּי מְרַגְּלִים אַתֶּם׃ 17 וַיֶּאֱסֹף אֹתָם אֶל־מִשְׁמָר שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים׃

18 וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם יוֹסֵף בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי זֹאת עֲשׂוּ וִחְיוּ אֶת־הָאֱלֹהִים אֲנִי יָרֵא׃ 19 אִם־כֵּנִים אַתֶּם אֲחִיכֶם אֶחָד יֵאָסֵר בְּבֵית

RASHI **14 It is just as I have told you.** What "I spoke" (OJPS) about you being spies is the truth. That is the straightforward sense of the verse. Now here is its midrash: He said to them, "And if you had found him and a huge ransom was demanded for him, would you have paid it?" They answered, "Yes." He replied, "And if they told you they would not give him back to you for any amount of money, what would you do?" They answered, "That is why we are here—to kill or be killed." He replied, "It is just as I have told you! You have come to kill the inhabitants of the city! I have divined with my goblet that two of you turned the great city of Shechem into ruins."

15 By Pharaoh. Literally, "as Pharaoh lives" (compare OJPS). When he swore to a lie, he made sure to swear by Pharaoh's life.

16 Else. More precisely, "if you don't [bring him]."

17 In the guardhouse. The jail.

19 In your place of detention. The place where you are currently imprisoned. **While the rest of you go and take home rations for your starving households.** OJPS

IBN EZRA **16 While the rest of you remain confined.** He is literally commanding them, "Be confined!" But of course that really means "You shall be confined" (compare OJPS). For a similar example, see "You shall die on the mountain" (Deut. 32:50), which literally has the command, "Die on the mountain!"

19 Rations for your starving households. Literally, "rations for the famine—your houses" (OJPS), meaning, of course, for

KIMHI and thought he might have mentioned his family. It was in fact well known that Joseph was a Hebrew; both Potiphar's wife (39:14) and the cupbearer (41:12) mention it. But perhaps he had not said anything about his family. So they said that he "was no more," which was definitely true if he was dead; if he was alive, he was certainly "no more" in his father's household.

14 It is just as I have told you: You are spies! You claim the youngest has remained behind to serve your father, but your own wives and children could certainly take care of your father until you get home.

17 And he confined them in the guardhouse for three days. Again, he was trying to annoy them without actually doing them any physical or financial harm.

18 Do this and you shall live, for I am a God-fearing man. I must keep one of you to put you to the test, but I do not want to be responsible for your families dying of hunger.

NAHMANIDES **17 And he confined them in the guardhouse for three days.** He wanted to frighten them, but also to convince them (when he finally let them out) that he was indeed "a God-fearing man" (v. 18).

19 The rest of you go and take home rations for your starving households. He genuinely was "a God-fearing man" (v. 18); he

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ How can Joseph announce, "It is just as I have told you: You are spies!" (v. 14), as if the brothers' response had convinced him of it? ✦ How can they be "put to the test" by having their "youngest brother" come to Egypt (v. 15)? Would having a younger brother make it impossible for them to be spies? ✦ How did Joseph dare to swear falsely "by Pharaoh," who had made him rise to greatness?

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS are telling the truth (Sforno). **The youngest, however, is now with our father.** No, our father has only the 10 of us and one more (Gersonides).

14 It is just as I have told you. Your younger brother is 30 years old? You could certainly have brought him along (Bekhor Shor). That brother who is "no more," and you won't tell me where he is—you sent him to report on what you have seen, or whatever it is you are spying on (Sforno).

15 By this you shall be put to the test: unless your youngest brother comes here, by Pharaoh, you shall not depart from this place! He must have asked them for a description of Benjamin and many other details. Otherwise they might think, "He won't know the difference," and bring down someone else (Bekhor Shor). "If your brother is so young, I will be able to test your claims; such a young boy will be too innocent to lie." But Joseph may not mean that they will be tested "by this," by bringing Benjamin down; he might mean, "Your claims have never been put to the test before—but *this* time you will be tested." Notice that Joseph's swearing "by Pharaoh" is not a lie at all. "You shall not *all* depart" unless your brother comes down—and Simeon remained. (Abarbanel). Unless he is really your brother, he will certainly not come down and tell your same lie and put himself in danger of death (Sforno).

16 Else, by Pharaoh, you are nothing but spies! Again, since their words were tested and found true, "by Pharaoh" is not invoked for a lie (Abarbanel).

17 He confined them in the guardhouse. This is either the prison or some room in his own mansion (Gersonides). **For three days.** Perhaps they had the same custom in Egypt back then that they do nowadays in the Spanish lands, to confine suspects for three days while the case is being investigated (Abarbanel).

19 Let one of you brothers be held in your place of detention, while the rest of you go and take home rations for your starving households. If I kept all the rest of you and released just one, he would not be able to bring home enough food (Bekhor Shor).

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NJPS place of detention, while the rest of you go and take home rations for your starving households; [20]but you must bring me your youngest brother, that your words may be verified and that you may not die." And they did accordingly. [21]They said to one another, "Alas, we are being punished on account of our brother, because we looked on at his anguish, yet paid no heed as he pleaded with us. That is why this distress has come upon us." [22]Then Reuben spoke up and said to them, "Did I not tell you, 'Do no wrong to the boy'? But you paid no heed. Now comes the reckoning for his

מִשְׁמַרְכֶם וְאַתֶּם֙ לְכ֣וּ הָבִ֔יאוּ שֶׁ֖בֶר רַעֲבוֹ֥ן בָּתֵּיכֶֽם׃ 20 וְאֶת־אֲחִיכֶם֙ הַקָּטֹ֔ן תָּבִ֖יאוּ אֵלַ֑י וְיֵאָמְנ֤וּ דִבְרֵיכֶם֙ וְלֹ֣א תָמֻ֔תוּ וַיַּֽעֲשׂוּ־כֵֽן׃ 21 וַיֹּאמְר֣וּ אִ֤ישׁ אֶל־אָחִיו֙ אֲבָל֙ אֲשֵׁמִ֣ים ׀ אֲנַ֣חְנוּ֔ עַל־אָחִ֑ינוּ אֲשֶׁ֨ר רָאִ֜ינוּ צָרַ֤ת נַפְשׁוֹ֙ בְּהִתְחַנְנ֣וֹ אֵלֵ֔ינוּ וְלֹ֥א שָׁמָ֖עְנוּ עַל־כֵּ֣ן בָּ֣אָה אֵלֵ֔ינוּ הַצָּרָ֖ה הַזֹּֽאת׃ 22 וַיַּ֤עַן רְאוּבֵן֙ אֹתָ֣ם לֵאמֹ֔ר הֲלוֹא֙ אָמַ֣רְתִּי אֲלֵיכֶ֔ם ׀ לֵאמֹ֖ר אַל־תֶּחֶטְא֣וּ בַיֶּ֑לֶד וְלֹ֣א

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ What is the real meaning of the Hebrew word that NJPS translates as "Alas" (v. 21)? ✦ Why did they only now say, "We are guilty" (see OJPS), and not during the three previous days when they were in the guardhouse? ✦ Why did Reuben "answer" them (v. 22; again, see OJPS) as if he were not in agreement with what they all said in v. 21? ✦ What good does it do now to rake up the past? ✦ What did Reuben mean about "the reckoning for his blood"?

OJPS be bound in your prison-house; but go ye, carry corn for the famine of your houses; [20]and bring your youngest brother unto me; so shall your words be verified, and ye shall not die." And they did so. [21]And they said one to another: "We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the distress of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear; therefore is this distress come upon us." [22]And Reuben answered them, saying: "Spoke I not unto you, saying: Do not sin against the child; and ye would not hear? therefore also, behold, his

RASHI translates more literally, but NJPS has the sense.

20 That your words may be verified. That they may be established as true. The root of *emet* ("truth") is actually the אמן of this verb; the *t* is an ending. Compare "let the promise that You made to Your servant my father David *come true*" (1 Kings 8:26). "Amen, amen!" (Num. 5:22) means "let it be so."

21 Alas. Rather, as Onkelos translates, "verily" (OJPS), "in truth." I have seen a comment in Genesis Rabbah saying that *aval* is the Hebrew equivalent of Latin *veram*. **[E] That is why this distress has come upon us.** The accent on the first syllable of the verb shows that it is past tense, "has come," and not the equivalent form with accent on the last syllable, the participle, "is coming."

22 For his blood. The Hebrew more literally says, "also [see OJPS] for his blood." Such words can be used midrashically to indicate an addition: "for his blood *and* for the old man's blood."

[E] Others think Rashi understands Genesis Rabbah to be calling this word "a southern [*sic*] equivalent of the Hebrew *b'ram* ['however']."

RASHBAM **21 That is why this distress has come upon us.** It is a case of "measure for measure." We cast him into a pit and now we ourselves are being imprisoned.

IBN EZRA the need created by the famine. Bring them [to] your households.

21 Alas. Rather, "indeed," as the word is used in "*indeed*, Sarah your wife shall bear you a son" (17:19). When Jacob says, "Surely the LORD is present in this place" (28:16), though he uses a different word, he captures the meaning of our word.

KIMHI **21 They said to one another.** After the "interpreter" (v. 23) had finished and left. Joseph had been careful not to speak Hebrew in front of them so they would not recognize him. They made this confession after the interpreter had gone. For Joseph had interrogated them as he did no one else among those who came to purchase grain. They knew they were paying the price for some great transgression. It was the transgression they had committed against Joseph. **That is why this distress has come upon us.** We learn from this story that when trouble comes upon us, we should examine our deeds and figure out what we have done wrong, repent for it before God, and seek forgiveness for it.

22 Now comes the reckoning for his blood. For they thought that he must be dead, since they had heard nothing from him since he was sold. "Whether he was killed or simply died alone in a foreign land, his blood is on us."

NAHMANIDES did not want their households to die of starvation. And they certainly would not have agreed to abandon one of the group if he had not arranged to save them all from starving.

21 We looked on at his anguish, yet paid no heed as he pleaded with us. They thought their cruelty was even more deserving of punishment than their selling him. After all, here was their brother, their own flesh and blood, begging them and pleading with them, and they did not take pity on him. The text did not originally tell us this aspect of the story, either because it was obvious that someone in such a situation would beg for mercy, adjure them by their father's life, and do everything he could to save himself from death; or because the text wished to cut the description of their crime mercifully short; or simply because the biblical text is regularly terse in one location and voluble in another.

22 Did I not tell you, "Do no wrong to the boy"? It was his immaturity that led him to act the way he did. You should have ignored his youthful indiscretions. **Now comes the reckoning for his blood.** Literally, "for his blood *also*," that is, for his blood as well as for the cruelty we practiced on him. Or perhaps it means that even if you did not actually kill him the Holy One may well count it against you as if you had also spilled his blood. For a dear son like him who is sold into slavery may well have died, being unused to hard labor. — The Sages take "also" to mean both his (Joseph's) blood and "also" the old man's blood.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **20 But you must bring me your youngest brother, that your words may be verified and that you may not die.** For even if you do not come back, I am perfectly capable of having you killed in Canaan (Sforno).

21 Alas, we are being punished on account of our brother. Rather, "we are [unwittingly] guilty" (OJPS), as the Hebrew word is used (e.g.) in Lev. 4:13. What is happening to us now resembles that thing we did to our brother, the kind of stupid thing a bunch of drunks would do (Abarbanel).

22 Then Reuben spoke up. Joseph had intended to keep Reuben in custody because he was the oldest. But when he heard what Reuben had to say, he did not want to harm him, and took the next oldest, Simeon (Bekhor Shor). **Did I not tell you, "Do no wrong to the boy"?** Your guilt was not unwitting, but deliberate (Abarbanel). **Now comes the reckoning for his blood.** Now "also" (OJPS). In addition to the wrong you did him as a brother, now comes the reckoning for what you did to him as a human being (Abarbanel).

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NJPS blood." [23]They did not know that Joseph understood, for there was an interpreter between him and them. [24]He turned away from them and wept. But he came back to them and spoke to them; and he took Simeon from among them and had him bound before their eyes. [25]Then Joseph gave orders to fill their bags with grain, return each one's money to his sack, and give them provisions for the journey; and this was done for them. [26]So they loaded their asses with the rations and departed from there.

[27]As one of them was opening his sack to give feed to his ass at the night encampment, he saw his money right there at the

OJPS blood is required." [23]And they knew not that Joseph understood them; for the interpreter was between them. [24]And he turned himself about from them, and wept; and he returned to them, and spoke to them, and took Simeon from among them, and bound him before their eyes. [25]Then Joseph commanded to fill their vessels with corn, and to restore every man's money into his sack, and to give them provision for the way; and thus was it done unto them. [26]And they laded their asses with their corn, and departed thence.

[27]And as one of them opened his sack to give his ass provender in the lodging-place, he espied his money; and, behold, it was in

שְׁמַעְתֶּם וְגַם־דָּמוֹ הִנֵּה נִדְרָשׁ׃ 23 וְהֵם֙ לֹ֣א
יָדְע֔וּ כִּ֥י שֹׁמֵ֖עַ יוֹסֵ֑ף כִּ֥י הַמֵּלִ֖יץ בֵּינֹתָֽם׃
24 וַיִּסֹּ֥ב מֵעֲלֵיהֶ֖ם וַיֵּ֑בְךְּ וַיָּ֣שָׁב אֲלֵהֶ֔ם וַיְדַבֵּ֣ר
אֲלֵהֶ֔ם וַיִּקַּ֥ח מֵאִתָּ֖ם אֶת־שִׁמְע֑וֹן וַיֶּאֱסֹ֥ר
אֹת֛וֹ לְעֵינֵיהֶֽם׃ 25 וַיְצַ֣ו יוֹסֵ֗ף וַיְמַלְאוּ֙ אֶת־
כְּלֵיהֶ֔ם בָּ֖ר וְלָהָשִׁ֣יב כַּסְפֵּיהֶ֑ם אִ֣ישׁ אֶל־
שַׂקּ֗וֹ וְלָתֵ֤ת לָהֶם֙ צֵדָ֔ה לַדָּ֖רֶךְ וַיַּ֣עַשׂ לָהֶ֔ם
כֵּֽן׃ 26 וַיִּשְׂאוּ֙ אֶת־שִׁבְרָ֔ם עַל־חֲמֹרֵיהֶ֖ם
וַיֵּלְכ֥וּ מִשָּֽׁם׃
27 וַיִּפְתַּ֤ח הָאֶחָד֙ אֶת־שַׂקּ֔וֹ לָתֵ֥ת מִסְפּ֖וֹא
לַחֲמֹר֑וֹ בַּמָּלֽוֹן וַיַּ֖רְא אֶת־כַּסְפּ֑וֹ וְהִנֵּה־הִ֖וא

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ How could Joseph be so cruel as to have Simeon "bound before their eyes" (v. 24) and add so much more to his elderly father's grief and worry? ✦ What made Joseph think imprisoning Simeon would make the brothers come back more than the famine itself? In the end, it was indeed the famine that made them return. ✦ If they hadn't returned, wouldn't Joseph have sent word to let his father know he was alive, as he eventually did?

RASHI **23 They did not know that Joseph understood.** That is why they spoke this way in front of him. **For there was an interpreter between him and them.** Whenever they spoke with him. The interpreter, who knew both Hebrew and Egyptian, would translate their words for Joseph and Joseph's words for them. So they were sure Joseph did not understand Hebrew. In fact, the interpreter was Joseph's son Manasseh.

24 He turned away from them. He moved far enough away from them that they could not see him crying. **And wept.** Having heard that they regretted what they had done. **Simeon.** The one who had thrown him into the pit, the one who had told Levi, "Here comes that dreamer!" (37:19). Another reading: Joseph wanted to separate him from Levi to prevent the two of them from planning to kill him. **And had him bound before their eyes.** But as soon as they were gone, he brought him out of the guardhouse and gave him something to eat and drink.

27 As one of them was opening his sack. It was Levi, who was now "one," having lost his partner, Simeon. **His bag.** Another word for "sack."

RASHBAM **23 For there was an interpreter between him and them.** Up to now, there had been an interpreter between him and them, as if he did not understand their language.

24 Simeon. To separate him from Levi so they could not plan some act of sabotage, as they had done at Shechem.

IBN EZRA **23 An interpreter.** The Hebrew word refers to a language specialist; it is related to "proverb and *epigram*" (Prov. 1:6).

24 Simeon. When a group sins, the oldest of them is punished the most. In this case, Reuben was skipped, since he had tried to save him.

25 Return each one's money. Literally, "return their silvers." Moses Gikatilla claims that "gold" and "silver" never occur in the plural—but he forgot this one. (And see also v. 35.)

26 So they loaded their asses with the rations. Which they had bought.

27 As one of them was opening his sack. "Of them" is not in the Hebrew, but of course that is what it means. Perhaps it was Reuben, who as first-born was the number-one son, the "one" of them.

KIMHI **24 He turned away from them and wept.** He had heard them confess.

25 Then Joseph gave orders to fill their bags with grain, return each one's money to his sack, and give them provisions for the journey; and this was done for them. More precisely: "Then Joseph gave orders [to his servants to fill their bags] and they filled their bags with grain; to return each one's money to his sack; and to give them provisions for the journey. And they did so for them." The latter phrase refers to returning the money and giving them provisions; they had already "filled their bags with grain."

27 He saw his money right there at the mouth of his bag. Joseph had ordered that the money of one of them be put at the mouth of his bag; the rest had their money put in the middle of their bag or at the bottom. If the money had been put at the mouth of each man's bag, they would all have discovered it when they opened the bags to feed their donkeys. They would have immediately gone back to Egypt to return it and protest their innocence. He did not want them to realize that they had all had their money returned until they got

NAHMANIDES **25 And give them provisions for the journey.** So they would not have to eat up any of the grain they had bought while they were traveling home. **And this was done for them.** Rather, "and he did this for them." He let them know he had done this by kindly putting the provisions for the journey right in their hands so they would feel comfortable bringing their brother down. "I have no reason to mistreat you if your words are verified."

27 As one of them was opening his sack. The others did not open their sacks until they got home, when "they [all] were emptying their sacks" (v. 35). Perhaps the others were buying straw to feed their asses; otherwise, they might use up their whole load of grain feeding the animals on the way home. But the ass of one of them was not strong enough, and he opened his sack to get some feed and found the money. **His bag.** See Rashi's comment. But Onkelos translates it as "his load." Apparently he thinks that each of them had one big sack plus a number of smaller ones to balance the load. One of them opened one of his sacks and found his money in it; the others did not happen to find theirs until they reached home and emptied all their sacks. It seems more likely to me that this "bag" is a saddlebag,

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **25 Return each one's money to his sack.** So they could return right away for more and would not have to wait to save more money (Abarbanel). "Money" never appears in the plural, but "silver coins" do (Sforno).

27 His bag. The bags and the sacks are the same; this Hebrew word is used specifically for bags of grain. But some explain that the "sacks" are the large bags of grain, and the "bags" are smaller bags used to hold their money and gear, put inside the large sacks for security (Abarbanel).

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בְּפִי אַמְתַּחְתּוֹ׃ 28 וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל־אֶחָיו הוּשַׁב כַּסְפִּי וְגַם הִנֵּה בְאַמְתַּחְתִּי וַיֵּצֵא לִבָּם וַיֶּחֶרְדּוּ אִישׁ אֶל־אָחִיו לֵאמֹר מַה־זֹּאת עָשָׂה אֱלֹהִים לָנוּ׃

29 וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶל־יַעֲקֹב אֲבִיהֶם אַרְצָה כְּנָעַן וַיַּגִּידוּ לוֹ אֵת כָּל־הַקֹּרֹת אֹתָם לֵאמֹר׃ 30 דִּבֶּר הָאִישׁ אֲדֹנֵי הָאָרֶץ אִתָּנוּ קָשׁוֹת וַיִּתֵּן אֹתָנוּ כְּמְרַגְּלִים אֶת־הָאָרֶץ׃ 31 וַנֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו כֵּנִים אֲנָחְנוּ לֹא הָיִינוּ מְרַגְּלִים׃ 32 שְׁנֵים־עָשָׂר אֲנַחְנוּ אַחִים בְּנֵי אָבִינוּ הָאֶחָד אֵינֶנּוּ וְהַקָּטֹן הַיּוֹם אֶת־אָבִינוּ בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן׃ 33 וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלֵינוּ הָאִישׁ אֲדֹנֵי הָאָרֶץ בְּזֹאת אֵדַע כִּי כֵנִים אַתֶּם אֲחֵיכֶם הָאֶחָד הַנִּיחוּ אִתִּי וְאֶת־רַעֲבוֹן בָּתֵּיכֶם קְחוּ וָלֵכוּ׃ 34 וְהָבִיאוּ אֶת־אֲחִיכֶם הַקָּטֹן אֵלַי וְאֵדְעָה כִּי לֹא מְרַגְּלִים אַתֶּם כִּי כֵנִים אַתֶּם אֶת־אֲחִיכֶם אֶתֵּן לָכֶם וְאֶת־הָאָרֶץ תִּסְחָרוּ׃

NJPS mouth of his bag. 28And he said to his brothers, "My money has been returned! It is here in my bag!" Their hearts sank; and, trembling, they turned to one another, saying, "What is this that God has done to us?"

29When they came to their father Jacob in the land of Canaan, they told him all that had befallen them, saying, 30"The man who is lord of the land spoke harshly to us and accused us of spying on the land. 31We said to him, 'We are honest men; we have never been spies! 32There were twelve of us brothers, sons by the same father; but one is no more, and the youngest is now with our father in the land of Canaan.' 33But the man who is lord of the land said to us, 'By this I shall know that you are honest men: leave one of your brothers with me, and take something for your starving households and be off. 34And bring your youngest brother to me, that I may know that you are not spies but honest men. I will then restore your brother to you, and you shall be free to move about in the land.'"

OJPS the mouth of his sack. 28And he said unto his brethren: "My money is restored; and, lo, it is even in my sack." And their heart failed them, and they turned trembling one to another, saying: "What is this that God hath done unto us?"

29And they came unto Jacob their father unto the land of Canaan, and told him all that had befallen them, saying: 30"The man, the lord of the land, spoke roughly with us, and took us for spies of the country. 31And we said unto him: We are upright men; we are no spies. 32We are twelve brethren, sons of our father; one is not, and the youngest is this day with our father in the land of Canaan. 33And the man, the lord of the land, said unto us: Hereby shall I know that ye are upright men: leave one of your brethren with me, and take corn for the famine of your houses, and go your way. 34And bring your youngest brother unto me; then shall I know that ye are no spies, but that ye are upright men; so will I deliver you your brother, and ye shall traffic in the land."

RASHI **28 It is here in my bag!** More precisely, "it is *also* in my sack" (compare OJPS)—not just the grain, but my money also. **What is this that God has done to us?** Getting us involved in this frame-up. For the money cannot have been returned for any other reason than to frame us.

34 You shall be free to move about in the land. The Hebrew verb is also used to describe commercial "traffic" (see OJPS). The same word can refer to merchants and to motion because merchants are always moving about in search of business.

RASHBAM **28 What is this that God has done to us?** In what way is giving us extra money a case of paying us back for our transgressions "measure for measure"?

IBN EZRA **33 Take something for your starving households.** Using the same idiom as in v. 19.

KIMHI home. He just wanted to disturb them. He knew they would not come back to Egypt for the money in just one bag.

28 Their hearts sank. Compare the similar expression in "I was faint" (Song 5:6).

NAHMANIDES and that everyone's money was put back into one side of his saddlebag; it just so happened that one of them opened the side with the money while they were on the road but the others didn't open that side of their bags. The Hebrew word used here, *amtaḥat*, is related to *mataḥ* ("stretch"), because a saddlebag stretches over both sides of the animal.

34 And you shall be free to move about in the land. They slightly altered what Joseph had said to them so as not to start a fight; they wanted Jacob to agree to let them take Benjamin down to Egypt with them. If it were up to them, they would have turned right back around with him had Jacob not told them, "My son must not go down with you" (v. 38). They did tell him that the man had said, "Leave one of your brothers with me" (v. 33), but not that they had been imprisoned and that Simeon still was. Of course, it is possible that Joseph did tell them, "You shall be free to traffic in the land" (see OJPS), but that the text did not mention it. He would have meant that they could bring merchandise down with which to buy grain, and that he would not collect duty on their merchandise, as a way of making up to them for the embarrassment they had been put through. So either what they tell their father in 43:7 is also an excuse they are making up, or perhaps Joseph really did ask them this as part of the conversation in vv. 7–16 of our chapter. Judah does seem to presume this when he tells Joseph, "My lord asked his servants, 'Have you a father or another brother?'" (44:19). Again, it is quite common for the text to omit some details in various stories or accounts. Rashi's explanation is careful to avoid the difficulty that Joseph said nothing to them about "trafficking" in merchandise. You will notice that Rashi did not make this comment when the same Hebrew verb was used in 34:10 and 34:21.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **28 What is this that God has done to us?** Is it good fortune, or are we being framed? (Abarbanel). Putting in the mind of this God-fearing man to pull this trick on us that will turn us into slaves if we return to him. We committed no sin in selling our brother, for he intended to have us killed, so we could have killed him to save ourselves. We sold him into slavery instead out of kindness, since he was our brother (Sforno).

29 They told him all that had befallen them. You must realize that if they told him all that had befallen them the Torah would not have had to record what they said to him. In fact, they omitted some things. They concealed from him that they had been imprisoned, and that Simeon still was in prison (Gersonides).

34 You shall be free to move about in the land. Joseph had not said anything of the kind; they made all this up to get Jacob to send Benjamin with them (Hizkuni).

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NJPS [35]As they were emptying their sacks, there, in each one's sack, was his money-bag! When they and their father saw their money-bags, they were dismayed. [36]Their father Jacob said to them, "It is always me that you bereave: Joseph is no more and Simeon is no more, and now you would take away Benjamin. These things always happen to me!" [37]Then Reuben said to his father, "You may kill my two sons if I do not bring him back to you. Put him in my care, and I will return him to you." [38]But he said, "My son must not go down with you, for his brother is dead and he alone is left. If he meets with disaster on the journey you are taking, you will send my white head down to Sheol in grief."

OJPS [35]And it came to pass as they emptied their sacks, that, behold, every man's bundle of money was in his sack; and when they and their father saw their bundles of money, they were afraid. [36]And Jacob their father said unto them: "Me have ye bereaved of my children: Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and ye will take Benjamin away; upon me are all these things come." [37]And Reuben spoke unto his father, saying: "Thou shalt slay my two sons, if I bring him not to thee; deliver him into my hand, and I will bring him back to thee." [38]And he said: "My son shall not go down with you; for his brother is dead, and he only is left; if harm befall him by the way in which ye go, then will ye bring down my gray hairs with sorrow to the grave."

[35] וַיְהִי֙ הֵ֣ם מְרִיקִ֔ים שַׂקֵּיהֶ֖ם וְהִנֵּה־אִ֣ישׁ צְרוֹר־כַּסְפּ֑וֹ בְּשַׂקּ֔וֹ וַיִּרְא֧וּ אֶת־צְרֹר֛וֹת כַּסְפֵּיהֶ֖ם הֵ֣מָּה וַאֲבִיהֶ֑ם וַיִּיָּרֵֽאוּ׃ [36] וַיֹּ֤אמֶר אֲלֵהֶם֙ יַעֲקֹ֣ב אֲבִיהֶ֔ם אֹתִ֥י שִׁכַּ֖לְתֶּם יוֹסֵ֣ף אֵינֶ֑נּוּ וְשִׁמְעוֹן֙ אֵינֶ֔נּוּ וְאֶת־בִּנְיָמִ֖ן תִּקָּ֑חוּ עָלַ֥י הָיְו֖ כֻּלָּֽנָה׃ [37] וַיֹּ֨אמֶר רְאוּבֵ֜ן אֶל־אָבִ֗יו לֵאמֹר֙ אֶת־שְׁנֵ֣י בָנַ֔י תָּמִ֖ית אִם־לֹ֣א אֲבִיאֶ֑נּוּ אֵלֶ֙יךָ֙ תְּנָ֣ה אֹת֔וֹ עַל־יָדִ֖י וַאֲנִ֥י אֲשִׁיבֶ֖נּוּ אֵלֶֽיךָ׃ [38] וַיֹּ֕אמֶר לֹ֥א־יֵרֵ֖ד בְּנִ֣י עִמָּכֶ֑ם כִּי־אָחִ֤יו מֵת֙ וְה֣וּא לְבַדּ֔וֹ נִשְׁאָ֔ר וּקְרָאֲתֻ֣הוּ אָס֔וֹן בַּדֶּ֖רֶךְ אֲשֶׁ֣ר תֵּלְכ֑וּ־בָּ֔הּ וְהוֹרַדְתֶּ֥ם אֶת־שֵׂיבָתִ֖י בְּיָג֥וֹן שְׁאוֹלָֽה׃

מג [1] וְהָרָעָ֖ב כָּבֵ֥ד בָּאָֽרֶץ׃ [2] וַיְהִי֙ כַּאֲשֶׁ֣ר כִּלּ֔וּ לֶאֱכֹ֖ל אֶת־הַשֶּׁ֑בֶר אֲשֶׁ֥ר הֵבִ֖יאוּ

43 But the famine in the land was severe. [2]And when they had eaten up the

RASHI **36 It is always me that you bereave.** He suspected they had killed or sold Simeon as they had Joseph. The Hebrew verb used here applies specifically to the loss of a child.

38 My son must not go down with you. He had not accepted Reuben's statement, thinking, "That stupid first-born of mine! He's offering to kill his two sons as if they were not also my grandsons."

43:2 When they had eaten up the rations. Judah said to them, "Wait until the last

IBN EZRA **36 These things.** All these troubles.

37 You may kill my two sons. Some think it is an idiom for "you may punish" them. Others take it as a prayer addressed to the Holy One. But if Reuben had said something reasonable, Jacob would not have ignored him.

KIMHI **35 There, in each one's sack, was his money-bag!** Notice that it does not say "in the mouth of each one's sack." See my comment to v. 27. **They were dismayed.** They were afraid the money had been planted there by the grain sellers to frame them as thieves.

37 You may kill my two sons. That is, "two of my sons"; he had four. **[C]** This was such a stupid thing to say that Jacob does not even bother to respond to it.

38 His brother is dead. If he were still alive, I certainly would have heard something about him by now.

43:1 But the famine in the land was severe. Judah told his brothers, "Just wait until the grain is completely used up. Then the old man will be willing to send his son with us."

[C] See 46:9.

NAHMANIDES **37 You may kill my two sons.** That is, he is swearing an oath to bring him back to his father, not literally meaning that Jacob should kill them. "If I do not bring him back to you, let the same punishment that befell you befall me." It is very much like Judah telling him, "If I do not bring him back to you and set him before you, I shall stand guilty before you forever" (43:9). Reuben had four sons, so he is telling his father, "For each of your sons, you may kill two of mine." But Jacob did not trust Reuben as much as he trusted Judah, for "Judah prevailed over his brothers" (1 Chron. 5:2). And of course Reuben had already sinned against his father once; **[H]** he just did not trust him. The bottom line was that Judah's plan was better—to leave Benjamin with his father until the last crust of bread was gone from the house. Then he would listen. That is what Judah is saying when he tells his father, "that we may live and not die—you and we and our children" (43:8).

[H] See 35:22.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **35 Money-bag.** This is the only verse in the Torah where this word occurs (Masorah).

36 Joseph is no more. Evidently Jacob was not entirely convinced that Joseph was dead, though he is uncertain enough to say so in v. 38 (Gersonides). **These things always happen to me!** Never to *you* and *your* children (Abarbanel). You are always bereaving me of my children, because you are always quarreling (Sforno).

37 You may kill my two sons if I do not bring him back to you. If Reuben were not slightly crazy, he would not have slept with his father's concubine (Gersonides). The ruler there is really a God-fearing man, Father; you need not fear. — As for his stupid promise, he was quite certain he would never have to fulfill it (Abarbanel).

38 My son must not go down with you. He did not accept Reuben's foolish proposal, and Levi knew his father thought he was a hothead. So it was up to Judah, who waited until the time was ripe to say anything (Bekhor Shor). Jacob did not want to argue with Reuben, so he pretended he was worried about the dangers of the trip. But he was really worried about what the man who was lord of the land might do (Abarbanel). The one son I have left from the wife who meant the most to me (Sforno). **You will send my white head down to Sheol in grief.** Now that Benjamin was grown, he had some slight consolation for the loss of Joseph. But if Benjamin were to die, Jacob would remain in mourning for the rest of his life, having nothing left of Rachel to console him (Gersonides).

43:2 Go again and procure some food for us. He was sure they had made up the story about Benjamin because they wanted to get rid of him the way they had gotten rid of Joseph (Sforno).

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מִמִּצְרַיִם וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵיהֶם אֲבִיהֶם שֻׁבוּ
שִׁבְרוּ־לָנוּ מְעַט־אֹכֶל׃ 3 וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו
יְהוּדָה לֵאמֹר הָעֵד הֵעִד בָּנוּ הָאִישׁ לֵאמֹר
לֹא־תִרְאוּ פָנַי בִּלְתִּי אֲחִיכֶם אִתְּכֶם׃
4 אִם־יֶשְׁךָ מְשַׁלֵּחַ אֶת־אָחִינוּ אִתָּנוּ נֵרְדָּה
וְנִשְׁבְּרָה לְךָ אֹכֶל׃ 5 וְאִם־אֵינְךָ מְשַׁלֵּחַ
לֹא נֵרֵד כִּי־הָאִישׁ אָמַר אֵלֵינוּ לֹא־תִרְאוּ
פָנַי בִּלְתִּי אֲחִיכֶם אִתְּכֶם׃ 6 וַיֹּאמֶר
יִשְׂרָאֵל לָמָּה הֲרֵעֹתֶם לִי לְהַגִּיד לָאִישׁ
הַעוֹד לָכֶם אָח׃ 7 וַיֹּאמְרוּ שָׁאֹל שָׁאַל־
הָאִישׁ לָנוּ וּלְמוֹלַדְתֵּנוּ לֵאמֹר הַעוֹד
אֲבִיכֶם חַי הֲיֵשׁ לָכֶם אָח וַנַּגֶּד־לוֹ עַל־פִּי
הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה הֲיָדוֹעַ נֵדַע כִּי יֹאמַר
הוֹרִידוּ אֶת־אֲחִיכֶם׃
8 וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוּדָה אֶל־יִשְׂרָאֵל אָבִיו שִׁלְחָה
הַנַּעַר אִתִּי וְנָקוּמָה וְנֵלֵכָה וְנִחְיֶה וְלֹא
נָמוּת גַּם־אֲנַחְנוּ גַּם־אַתָּה גַּם־טַפֵּנוּ׃
9 אָנֹכִי אֶעֶרְבֶּנּוּ מִיָּדִי תְּבַקְשֶׁנּוּ אִם־לֹא
הֲבִיאֹתִיו אֵלֶיךָ וְהִצַּגְתִּיו לְפָנֶיךָ וְחָטָאתִי
לְךָ כָּל־הַיָּמִים׃ 10 כִּי לוּלֵא הִתְמַהְמָהְנוּ
כִּי־עַתָּה שַׁבְנוּ זֶה פַּעֲמָיִם׃

NJPS rations which they had brought from Egypt, their father said to them, "Go again and procure some food for us." [3]But Judah said to him, "The man warned us, 'Do not let me see your faces unless your brother is with you.' [4]If you will let our brother go with us, we will go down and procure food for you; [5]but if you will not let him go, we will not go down, for the man said to us, 'Do not let me see your faces unless your brother is with you.'" [6]And Israel said, "Why did you serve me so ill as to tell the man that you had another brother?" [7]They replied, "But the man kept asking about us and our family, saying, 'Is your father still living? Have you another brother?' And we answered him accordingly. How were we to know that he would say, 'Bring your brother here'?"

[8]Then Judah said to his father Israel, "Send the boy in my care, and let us be on our way, that we may live and not die—you and we and our children. [9]I myself will be surety for him; you may hold me responsible: if I do not bring him back to you and set him before you, I shall stand guilty before you forever. [10]For we could have been there and back twice if we had not dawdled."

OJPS eaten up the corn which they had brought out of Egypt, that their father said unto them: "Go again, buy us a little food." [3]And Judah spoke unto him, saying: "The man did earnestly forewarn us, saying: Ye shall not see my face, except your brother be with you. [4]If thou wilt send our brother with us, we will go down and buy thee food; [5]but if thou wilt not send him, we will not go down, for the man said unto us: Ye shall not see my face, except your brother be with you." [6]And Israel said: "Wherefore dealt ye so ill with me, as to tell the man whether ye had yet a brother?" [7]And they said: "The man asked straitly concerning ourselves, and concerning our kindred, saying: Is your father yet alive? have ye another brother? and we told him according to the tenor of these words; could we in any wise know that he would say: Bring your brother down?"

[8]And Judah said unto Israel his father: "Send the lad with me, and we will arise and go, that we may live, and not die, both we, and thou, and also our little ones. [9]I will be surety for him; of my hand shalt thou require him; if I bring him not unto thee, and set him before thee, then let me bear the blame for ever. [10]For except we had lingered, surely we had now returned a second time."

RASHI crumb is gone from the old man's house."

3 The man warned us. The verb might literally be taken as "he testified against us." The point is that "warning" in such cases is a technical, public procedure: "Go down, warn the people" (Exod. 19:21); "I have repeatedly and persistently warned your fathers" (Jer. 11:7). **Do not let me see your faces unless your brother is with you.** More precisely, "if your brother is not with you." The translations follow Onkelos, who paraphrases slightly.

IBN EZRA 43:8 You and we and our children. Hebrew style in such cases is to use the word *gam* even with the first item: "*also* we, also you, also our children." Compare the Hebrew of "rule over us—you, your son, and your grandson as well" (Judg. 8:22).

7 About us and our family. That is, "our [current] families." But a midrash takes them to be saying that he asked about their family growing up. "He even told us what kind of wood our cribs were made of!" **And we answered him.** That we had a father and another brother. **Accordingly.** That is, we had to answer the questions he asked.

8 That we may live. Prophecy flickered within him for a moment: our going to Egypt will bring you back to life. And indeed "the spirit of their father Jacob revived" (45:27). **And not die.** Of famine. Will Benjamin be seized if we take him to Egypt? Maybe yes, maybe no. But if we don't go, we will all die of famine. We had better take our chances with what is doubtful and act on what is certain.

9 And set him before you. In other words, I will not "bring him back to you" dead, but alive. **I shall stand guilty before you forever.** In the World to Come.

10 If we had not dawdled. If we had not dawdled—because of you—we would already be back with Simeon, and you would not have suffered all this long time.

KIMHI **8 You and we and our children.** More precisely, "we and you and our children" (see the correct order in OJPS)—raising the stakes with each one for rhetorical purposes.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **8 That we may live and not die.** The apparent redundancy is simply a feature of linguistic style; it is quite common in Arabic (Gersonides). And not die at the hands of the man [see 42:20] who told us, "You must bring me your youngest brother, that your words may be verified and that you may not die" (Sforno). **You and we and our children.** Or perhaps Judah was saying, "If we travel around trying to buy grain here in Canaan, the whole family may be killed by Canaanites seeking revenge for Shechem. If we go to Egypt to buy it, no one will be in danger but those of us who go down there" (Gersonides).

9 You may hold me responsible. If you give him to us all as a group, everyone will rely on someone else to be responsible (Bekhor Shor). **If I do not bring him back to you and set him before you.** You need not worry about the money we found in our sacks; Benjamin was not with us on the previous trip (Bekhor Shor).

10 For we could have been there and back twice if we had not dawdled. And the price of grain would not have risen so high, for grain would still have been relatively plentiful (Bekhor Shor). The man is God-fearing and will not delay us for one moment once he learns the truth; that is why I agreed to "stand guilty before you forever" (v. 9) if I do not bring Benjamin back (Sforno).

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NJPS [11]Then their father Israel said to them, "If it must be so, do this: take some of the choice products of the land in your baggage, and carry them down as a gift for the man—some balm and some honey, gum, ladanum, pistachio nuts, and almonds. [12]And take with you double the money, carrying back with you the money that was replaced in the mouths of your bags; perhaps it was a mistake. [13]Take your brother too; and go back at once to the man. [14]And may El Shaddai dispose the man to mercy toward you, that he may release to you your other brother, as well as Benjamin. As for me, if I am to be bereaved, I shall be bereaved."

11 וַיֹּ֤אמֶר אֲלֵהֶם֙ יִשְׂרָאֵ֣ל אֲבִיהֶ֔ם אִם־כֵּ֖ן
אֵפוֹא֑ זֹ֣את עֲשׂ֗וּ קְח֤וּ מִזִּמְרַת֙ הָאָ֔רֶץ
בִּכְלֵיכֶ֔ם וְהוֹרִ֥ידוּ לָאִ֖ישׁ מִנְחָ֑ה מְעַ֤ט צֳרִי֙
וּמְעַ֣ט דְּבַ֔שׁ נְכֹ֥את וָלֹ֖ט בָּטְנִ֥ים וּשְׁקֵדִֽים׃
12 וְכֶ֥סֶף מִשְׁנֶ֖ה קְח֣וּ בְיֶדְכֶ֑ם וְאֶת־הַכֶּ֣סֶף
הַמּוּשָׁ֗ב בְּפִי֙ אַמְתְּחֹ֣תֵיכֶ֔ם תָּשִׁ֖יבוּ בְּיֶדְכֶ֑ם
אוּלַ֖י מִשְׁגֶּ֥ה הֽוּא׃ 13 וְאֶת־אֲחִיכֶ֥ם קָ֖חוּ
וְק֥וּמוּ שׁ֖וּבוּ אֶל־הָאִֽישׁ׃ 14 וְאֵ֣ל שַׁדַּ֗י יִתֵּ֨ן
לָכֶ֜ם רַחֲמִ֤ים לִפְנֵי֙ הָאִ֔ישׁ וְשִׁלַּ֥ח לָכֶ֖ם
אֶת־אֲחִיכֶ֣ם אַחֵ֑ר וְאֶת־בִּנְיָמִין֙ וַאֲנִ֣י
כַאֲשֶׁ֔ר שָׁכֹ֖לְתִּי שָׁכָֽלְתִּי׃

OJPS [11]And their father Israel said unto them: "If it be so now, do this: take of the choice fruits of the land in your vessels, and carry down the man a present, a little balm, and a little honey, spicery and ladanum, nuts, and almonds; [12]and take double money in your hand; and the money that was returned in the mouth of your sacks carry back in your hand; peradventure it was an oversight; [13]take also your brother, and arise, go again unto the man; [14]and God Almighty give you mercy before the man, that he may release unto you your other brother and Benjamin. And as for me, if I be bereaved of my children, I am bereaved."

RASHI **11 If it must be so, do this.** The Hebrew adds a word that NJPS omits (see OJPS): "If it must be so, somehow." If I am going to be forced to send him with you, I must somehow figure out a plan to suggest to you. **Some of the choice products of the land.** Those whose praises are "sung," as the Hebrew implies. **Gum.** Rather, "wax." **[F] Pistachio nuts.** I do not know what "pistachios" are, but that is how the *Alphabet of R. Machir* defines this Hebrew word. From the sound of the word, I imagine they are some kind of peach.

12 And take with you double the money. To buy food, in case the price has gone up. **Perhaps it was a mistake.** Perhaps the steward forgot it by mistake.

14 And may El Shaddai dispose the man to mercy toward you. Now you have everything you need but prayer. So I will pray for you. — El Shaddai is "the God who [has] enough power" to grant mercy to you. May He grant you mercy. That is the

[F] Contrast Rashi's comment on the same word in 37:25.

KIMHI **11 The choice products of the land.** Not the products "whose praises are sung," but products that themselves "sing the praises" of the land. **Some balm and some honey.** As we see from "Judah and the land of Israel were your merchants; they trafficked with you in wheat of Minnith and Pannag, honey, oil, and balm" (Ezek. 27:17), honey and balm (also called "balsam") were exported from the land of Israel.

12 Perhaps it was a mistake. The grain sellers may have left their money bags in the grain temporarily and then loaded them accidentally into the bags of grain. When you return them, they will know you are trustworthy and will treat you well.

14 If I am to be bereaved, I shall be bereaved. As is common when the same word is repeated, the form is slightly changed. Here, the first word is pointed like a stative verb and the second one like an active verb. He is essentially saying, "What can I do?"

IBN EZRA **11 Do this.** "This" is feminine, matching some Hebrew word that must be understood: this plan, this course of action. **Some of the choice products of the land.** For choice, compare "we hear *singing*" (Isa. 24:16)—they are items whose praises are widely sung. **Balm . . . gum.** See the explanations of these words in my comments to 37:25. **Pistachio nuts.** There is no related word anywhere in the Bible. Many do say that it refers to nuts of some kind.

12 Double the money. Literally, "a second [amount of] money."

14 And may El Shaddai dispose the man to mercy toward you. For He has the power to do that kind of thing. **If I am to be bereaved, I shall be bereaved.** The verbs are actually in the past tense: "As I *was*

RASHBAM **43:12 Double the money.** To buy with. **Perhaps it was a mistake.** The clerks put it in the mouth of each one's saddlebag so they could recognize which bag was whose, based on the amount; but they forgot to come back and retrieve it.

14 As for me, if I am to be bereaved, I shall be bereaved. Compare "if I am to perish, I shall perish!" (Esther 4:16). *Que sera, sera.*

NAHMANIDES **43:14 That he may release to you your other brother, as well as Benjamin.** The straightforward sense would seem to be that Jacob disfavored Simeon because of the Shechem episode. Not only is he unwilling to pronounce his name here, but he has already let him languish in an Egyptian jail for quite a long time. If they had not now run out of food, he still would not have sent Benjamin, and would have left Simeon in Egypt. See, however, Rashi's comment (found also in Genesis Rabbah), which is most certainly correct. No doubt Jacob decided that as long as he is invoking El Shaddai he might as well pray for Joseph too, in case he was still alive. But something else is going on in Genesis Rabbah. They take the "other" brother to be Judah, and see Jacob's going down to Egypt as symbolic of our future exile at the hands of Edom, as I will explain in my comment to 47:28. Jacob prophetically saw this, and he prayed both for his current situation and also for that of the future generations. "Your brother" (according to this midrash) refers to the exile of the Ten Tribes, "other" and "Benjamin" to the later exile of Judah and Benjamin. According to this midrash, our verse has profound depths. "El Shaddai" represents the divine aspect of justice. "Dispose the man to mercy"—"the man" invoking Exod. 15:3, "the LORD is a *man* of war"—is asking that He bring you up from the aspect of justice to that of mercy. One who is enlightened will understand. **As for me, if I am to be bereaved, I shall be bereaved.** See

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **11 If it must be so.** Rather, if what you said "be so" (OJPS), that the man is God-fearing (Sforno). **Take some of the choice products of the land in your baggage, and carry them down as a gift for the man.** As he had done with Esau, he took precautions to prepare a gift (Abarbanel). Make sure he gets it before you see him, so you can find out whether it will placate him. As Manoah's wife says in Judg. 13:23, "Had the LORD meant to take our lives, He would not have accepted a burnt offering and meal offering from us" (Sforno).

12 Perhaps it was a mistake. Perhaps you forgot to hand over the money for the original purchase (Bekhor Shor).

14 May El Shaddai dispose the man to mercy toward you. Again as with Esau, Jacob made sure to pray as well (Abarbanel). **If I am to be bereaved, I shall be bereaved.** As I am bereaved of Joseph and Simeon, so I will fear being bereaved of all of you until you return (Gersonides). He prayed "for you" but not for himself; he says, "as for me" (OJPS), which Esther did not say (Abarbanel).

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15 וַיִּקְחוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים אֶת־הַמִּנְחָה הַזֹּאת
וּמִשְׁנֶה־כֶּסֶף לָקְחוּ בְיָדָם וְאֶת־בִּנְיָמִן
וַיָּקֻמוּ וַיֵּרְדוּ מִצְרַיִם וַיַּעַמְדוּ לִפְנֵי יוֹסֵף׃
16 וַיַּרְא יוֹסֵף אִתָּם אֶת־בִּנְיָמִין וַיֹּאמֶר
לַאֲשֶׁר עַל־בֵּיתוֹ הָבֵא אֶת־הָאֲנָשִׁים
הַבַּיְתָה וּטְבֹחַ טֶבַח וְהָכֵן כִּי אִתִּי יֹאכְלוּ
הָאֲנָשִׁים בַּצָּהֳרָיִם׃ 17 וַיַּעַשׂ הָאִישׁ כַּאֲשֶׁר
אָמַר יוֹסֵף וַיָּבֵא הָאִישׁ אֶת־הָאֲנָשִׁים
בֵּיתָה יוֹסֵף׃ 18 וַיִּירְאוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים כִּי הוּבְאוּ
בֵּית יוֹסֵף וַיֹּאמְרוּ עַל־דְּבַר הַכֶּסֶף הַשָּׁב
בְּאַמְתְּחֹתֵינוּ בַּתְּחִלָּה אֲנַחְנוּ מוּבָאִים

NJPS 15So the men took that gift, and they took with them double the money, as well as Benjamin. They made their way down to Egypt, where they presented themselves to Joseph. 16When Joseph saw Benjamin with them, he said to his house steward, "Take the men into the house; slaughter and prepare an animal, for the men will dine with me at noon." 17The man did as Joseph said, and he brought the men into Joseph's house. 18But the men were frightened at being brought into Joseph's house. "It must be," they thought, "because of the money replaced in our bags the first time

OJPS 15And the men took that present, and they took double money in their hand, and Benjamin; and rose up, and went down to Egypt, and stood before Joseph. 16And when Joseph saw Benjamin with them, he said to the steward of his house: "Bring the men into the house, and kill the beasts, and prepare the meat; for the men shall dine with me at noon." 17And the man did as Joseph bade; and the man brought the men into Joseph's house. 18And the men were afraid, because they were brought into Joseph's house; and they said: "Because of the money that was returned in our sacks at the first time

RASHI straightforward sense of the words. And the midrash: The one who (*she-*) said "Enough!" (*dai*) when creating the world can say "Enough!" to my troubles. For I have not had a quiet moment since I was a boy. Trouble with Laban, trouble with Esau, trouble with Rachel, trouble with Dinah, trouble with Joseph, trouble with Simeon, trouble with Benjamin. **That he may release to you**. As in "he shall *let him go free*" (Exod. 21:26). **Your other brother**. Simeon. But the Hebrew is unusual: "your brother, another." The Holy Spirit was sprinkled over him, to include "another" brother: Joseph. **As for me, if I am to be bereaved, I shall be bereaved**. More precisely, "while I am bereaved, I am bereaved." Just as I am bereaved of Joseph and Simeon until you return, I am potentially bereaved of Benjamin as well.

IBN EZRA bereaved [by the death of Joseph], I have [now, I suppose,] been bereaved [of them all]."

18 As a pretext. The Hebrew is actually a verb (see OJPS), related to "in return" of Deut. 15:10. **To attack us**. Literally, to "fall upon us" (OJPS). The image is of a man who pretends someone has tripped him and then accuses him, "You tripped me!"

15 As well as Benjamin. Literally, "they took double money in their hand, and Benjamin" (OJPS). NJPS is as uncomfortable with "taking money and Benjamin" as Onkelos was; you simply cannot say this in Aramaic. So Onkelos says that they "took" the money and "brought" Benjamin.

16 Slaughter and prepare an animal. The grammatical forms here are actually infinitives, not imperatives: "[You are instructed] to slaughter and to prepare." The imperative form is *t'vaḥ*, not *t'voaḥ*. **At noon**. Onkelos says "at the noon meal." Elsewhere he translates literally, "at midday."

18 But the men were frightened. That the purpose was simply to take them into custody. Notice the two י in the verb: "they were frightened," not "they saw." **At being brought into Joseph's house**. It was not usual for those who came to buy rations to stay at Joseph's house; ordinarily they would stay at various inns in the city. **That we have been brought inside**. "Inside" is not in the Hebrew; but that must be the sense of the expression. **As a pretext**. Literally, "for it to roll over us"—"it" being the frame-up with the money.

KIMHI **15 They made their way down to Egypt, where they presented themselves to Joseph**. They found him in the streets, on their way to their lodging. He did not greet them there, but having seen them he told his steward to bring them to his house.

16 For the men will dine with me at noon. That is when government officials eat their meal: "Happy are you, O land whose king is a master and whose ministers dine at the proper time" (Eccles. 10:17). Joseph, of course, was running the entire country.

NAHMANIDES Rashi's comment; but what he is really saying is this: You cannot bereave me any more than I am already bereaved. He was reconciled to anything else that might happen because of the intense pain he still felt for the loss of Joseph. It is like what Esther says in Esther 4:16: "I am so lost that even if he kills me I have nothing more to lose." On the historic level, the midrash in Genesis Rabbah takes this phrase to mean, "As I was bereaved by the destruction of the First Temple, so I was bereaved by the destruction of the Second Temple. But I will never be bereaved again."

18 As a pretext. See 2 Sam. 20:12 and Isa. 9:4; this is really a verb that means "to roll"—in our verse, like a man who rolls right over someone else. **To attack us.** Literally, "to fall full length" deliberately upon us. Onkelos understands the first verb as "to overpower" (as big waves do) and the second verb as implying the intent to cause something that did not actually happen to "fall" upon them as if out of nowhere. For a thing that does not happen is said to have "fallen"; see the opposite expression in "not one of the good things that the LORD your God promised you *has failed to happen*" (Josh. 23:14). **And seize us as slaves, with our pack animals.** They were worried that the animals and the saddlebags would be seized. That would mean they could not send grain to their families, and they would all die of starvation.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **15 They presented themselves to Joseph**. Rather, they "stood before" him (OJPS). But they were afraid to say anything to him (Bekhor Shor). They were so afraid that they stood quite far away from him. He, meanwhile, was afraid his feelings for Benjamin would give him away. But they thought he was angry about the money they had found in their bags (Hizkuni). They "stood before Joseph" (OJPS) before they had an opportunity to give him the gifts, which is why they were afraid when they were taken to his house (Sforno).

16 Take the men into the house. Rather, take them "home," to the house where I live. — For at the time Joseph was in the gate of the king, or in his office (Sforno).

18 But the men were frightened at being brought into Joseph's house. It was not normal for merchants to be brought there unless there was a meeting scheduled—or unless they were being taken into custody (Bekhor Shor). **And seize us as slaves, with our pack animals**. If they had just brought us here, they might have wanted only to speak with us; bringing the animals too means they have

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NJPS that we have been brought inside, as a pretext to attack us and seize us as slaves, with our pack animals." [19]So they went up to Joseph's house steward and spoke to him at the entrance of the house. [20]"If you please, my lord," they said, "we came down once before to procure food. [21]But when we arrived at the night encampment and opened our bags, there was each one's money in the mouth of his bag, our money in full. So we have brought it back with us. [22]And we have brought down with us other money to procure food. We do not know who put the money in our bags." [23]He replied, "All is well with you; do not be afraid. Your God, the God of your father, must have put treasure in your bags for you. I got your payment." And he brought out Simeon to them.

OJPS are we brought in; that he may seek occasion against us, and fall upon us, and take us for bondmen, and our asses." [19]And they came near to the steward of Joseph's house, and they spoke unto him at the door of the house, [20]and said: "Oh my lord, we came indeed down at the first time to buy food. [21]And it came to pass, when we came to the lodging-place, that we opened our sacks, and, behold, every man's money was in the mouth of his sack, our money in full weight; and we have brought it back in our hand. [22]And other money have we brought down in our hand to buy food. We know not who put our money in our sacks." [23]And he said: "Peace be to you, fear not; your God, and the God of your father, hath given you treasure in your sacks; I had your money." And he brought Simeon out unto them.

לְהִתְגֹּלֵל עָלֵינוּ וּלְהִתְנַפֵּל עָלֵינוּ וְלָקַחַת אֹתָנוּ לַעֲבָדִים וְאֶת־חֲמֹרֵינוּ׃ 19 וַיִּגְּשׁוּ אֶל־הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר עַל־בֵּית יוֹסֵף וַיְדַבְּרוּ אֵלָיו פֶּתַח הַבָּיִת׃ 20 וַיֹּאמְרוּ בִּי אֲדֹנִי יָרֹד יָרַדְנוּ בַּתְּחִלָּה לִשְׁבָּר־אֹכֶל׃ 21 וַיְהִי כִּי־בָאנוּ אֶל־הַמָּלוֹן וַנִּפְתְּחָה אֶת־אַמְתְּחֹתֵינוּ וְהִנֵּה כֶסֶף־אִישׁ בְּפִי אַמְתַּחְתּוֹ כַּסְפֵּנוּ בִּמְשְׁקָלוֹ וַנָּשֶׁב אֹתוֹ בְיָדֵנוּ׃ 22 וְכֶסֶף אַחֵר הוֹרַדְנוּ בְיָדֵנוּ לִשְׁבָּר־אֹכֶל לֹא יָדַעְנוּ מִי־שָׂם כַּסְפֵּנוּ בְּאַמְתְּחֹתֵינוּ׃ 23 וַיֹּאמֶר שָׁלוֹם לָכֶם אַל־תִּירָאוּ אֱלֹהֵיכֶם וֵאלֹהֵי אֲבִיכֶם נָתַן לָכֶם מַטְמוֹן בְּאַמְתְּחֹתֵיכֶם כַּסְפֶּכֶם בָּא אֵלָי וַיּוֹצֵא אֲלֵהֶם אֶת־שִׁמְעוֹן׃

RASHI **20 If you please, my lord.** "If you please" is related to the similar-sounding Aramaic word repeated on B. Yoma 69b: *biyya biyya,* a word of supplication. **We came down once before to procure food.** And for us that was quite a comedown. We are used to supporting others, but now it is we who are in need of you.

23 Your God, the God of your father, must have put treasure in your bags. Your God put it there as a reward for you. And if you yourselves did not deserve such a reward, then your father must have.

KIMHI **19 And spoke to him at the entrance of the house.** So that those inside could not hear.

23 And he brought out Simeon to them. To reassure them.

NAHMANIDES **20 If you please, my lord.** Rashi's comment that he is supplicating Joseph in Tartessian **[I]** is very strange. That word *biyya* on B. Yoma 69b is not our Hebrew word at all. It is not as if you can simply cut *biyya* in half and use only part of it. Nor is it a word of supplication as Rashi seems to think. It is a cry for help: "Woe!" There is a similar word in Arabic and indeed in Greek. That is how the Aramaic word is used in Genesis Rabbah, too, and over and over again in other midrashim. **[J]** Even Onkelos did not imagine that this word is derived from Aramaic "to ask"; he is simply explaining it in its context. As for Ibn Ezra, if his explanation were correct, we would find *bi* used with other words as well. In fact, it is never followed by any other words than "my lord" or "O Lord." I therefore think that the expression must mean, "As for me, you are my lord and governor." "Me" and "my" are repeated for emphasis, as in the Hebrew of "Let the blame be mine, my lord" (1 Sam. 25:24) and "he did not invite me, your servant" (1 Kings 1:26). The Hebrew of "You had no help but Me" (Hosea 13:9) displays a similar phenomenon.

23 Must have put treasure in your bags for you. If Ibn Ezra is right, the man was just trying to make them feel better. How could each one's precise amount of money end up back in his bag? Actually "treasure" and the verb from the same root can be used for anything that is concealed: "We have *stores hidden* in a field—wheat, barley, oil, and honey" (Jer. 41:8); "the lazy man *buries* his hand in the bowl" (Prov. 19:24). This is what he was saying to them: "The drivers of pack animals who carry grain always keep their money in sacks. The man who dispenses the rations obviously took some sacks from the people who came down here, filled 10 of them with grain, and the money was covered up by the grain. His boss came along and told him to toss them in your bags, either because he was in a hurry to get you out of here or because he thought he hadn't gotten any money from the people they actually belonged to." The point is this: Everyone

[I] A very slight change in the Hebrew would turn this into "Syriac" (a dialect of Aramaic), making Nahmanides' comment somewhat less sarcastic. **[J]** We omit Nahmanides' Aramaic citations from these midrashim.

IBN EZRA **20 If you please.** "If you please" is the correct translation. But in my opinion *bi* has its usual meaning here: "in me," being shorthand for the expression "let the blame be *in me,* my lord" (1 Sam. 25:24). They are saying, "Do *against me* whatever you wish, only please hear me."

23 Must have put treasure in your bags. Someone must have had treasure stored with his grain and forgotten about it when he put his grain in the public storehouse. You got lucky.

RASHBAM **19 And spoke to him at the entrance of the house.** Before they went inside.

23 The God of your father. Everyone knew that they had experience with miracles.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS something planned against us (Hizkuni). They were afraid that either Joseph or the steward had thought, "These men have their own pack animals—we can use them both for work and for transport" (Abarbanel).

19 So they went up to Joseph's house steward and spoke to him at the entrance of the house. Before going in. If they waited to confess until they were brought inside and saw the chains and fetters, the Egyptians might say, "You only confessed because you knew you were trapped" (Bekhor Shor).

21 When we arrived at the night encampment and opened our bags, there was each one's money in the mouth of his bag, our money in full. "We could tell it was not just money, but exactly the same money we had brought." They did not, however, tell him that really only one of them had found the money "at the night encampment"; they did not want to arouse his suspicions about why that one had not returned right away with the money. They could not all have done so because their families were waiting for food (Abarbanel).

23 And he brought out Simeon to them. It was as much as to say, "We are not suspicious of you and have nothing against you" (Bekhor Shor).

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NJPS 24Then the man brought the men into Joseph's house; he gave them water to bathe their feet, and he provided feed for their asses. 25They laid out their gifts to await Joseph's arrival at noon, for they had heard that they were to dine there.

26When Joseph came home, they presented to him the gifts that they had brought with them into the house, bowing low before him to the ground. 27He greeted them, and he said, "How is your aged father of whom you spoke? Is he still in good health?" 28They replied, "It is well with your servant our father; he is still in good health." And they bowed and made obeisance.

29Looking about, he saw his brother Benjamin, his mother's son, and asked, "Is this your youngest brother of whom you spoke to me?" And he went on, "May God be gracious to you, my boy."

24 וַיָּבֵא הָאִישׁ אֶת־הָאֲנָשִׁים בֵּיתָה יוֹסֵף
וַיִּתֵּן־מַיִם וַיִּרְחֲצוּ רַגְלֵיהֶם וַיִּתֵּן מִסְפּוֹא
לַחֲמֹרֵיהֶם׃ 25 וַיָּכִינוּ אֶת־הַמִּנְחָה עַד־
בּוֹא יוֹסֵף בַּצָּהֳרַיִם כִּי שָׁמְעוּ כִּי־שָׁם
יֹאכְלוּ לָחֶם׃
26 וַיָּבֹא יוֹסֵף הַבַּיְתָה וַיָּבִיאוּ* לוֹ אֶת־
הַמִּנְחָה אֲשֶׁר־בְּיָדָם הַבַּיְתָה וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲווּ־לוֹ
אָרְצָה׃ 27 וַיִּשְׁאַל לָהֶם לְשָׁלוֹם וַיֹּאמֶר
הֲשָׁלוֹם אֲבִיכֶם הַזָּקֵן אֲשֶׁר אֲמַרְתֶּם
הַעוֹדֶנּוּ חָי׃ 28 וַיֹּאמְרוּ שָׁלוֹם לְעַבְדְּךָ
לְאָבִינוּ עוֹדֶנּוּ חָי וַיִּקְּדוּ וישתחו וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲווּ׃
29 וַיִּשָּׂא עֵינָיו וַיַּרְא אֶת־בִּנְיָמִין אָחִיו
בֶּן־אִמּוֹ וַיֹּאמֶר הֲזֶה אֲחִיכֶם הַקָּטֹן אֲשֶׁר
אֲמַרְתֶּם אֵלָי וַיֹּאמַר אֱלֹהִים יָחְנְךָ בְּנִי׃

v. 26. א׳ דגושה

OJPS 24And the man brought the men into Joseph's house, and gave them water, and they washed their feet; and he gave their asses provender. 25And they made ready the present against Joseph's coming at noon; for they heard that they should eat bread there.

26And when Joseph came home, they brought him the present which was in their hand into the house, and bowed down to him to the earth. 27And he asked them of their welfare, and said: "Is your father well, the old man of whom ye spoke? Is he yet alive?" 28And they said: "Thy servant our father is well, he is yet alive." And they bowed the head, and made obeisance.

29And he lifted up his eyes, and saw Benjamin his brother, his mother's son, and said: "Is this your youngest brother of whom ye spoke unto me?" And he said: "God be gracious unto thee, my son."

RASHI **24 Then the man brought the men into Joseph's house.** Vv. 17 and 18 already tell us twice that they had been "brought into Joseph's house." But they had pushed past him and got out, so when they "spoke to him" (v. 19) they were outside, "at the entrance of the house." But when he told them, "All is well with you" (v. 23), they turned back and followed him in again.

25 They laid out their gifts. Literally, they "prepared" them, arranging them in attractive containers.

26 Into the house. They brought them from the foyer into the dining room.

28 And they bowed and made obeisance. For his gracious greeting. "Bowing" means bowing the head; "making obeisance" means prostrating oneself on the ground.

29 May God be gracious to you, my boy. "Grace" has been invoked on all the other tribes already: "The children with whom God has *favored* your servant" (33:5). But Benjamin was not yet born at that time. That is why Joseph uses that word to bless him now.

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ What sense does Joseph's blessing of Benjamin—"May God be gracious to you, my boy" (v. 29)—make? Benjamin was already 31 years old and had 10 sons! Joseph himself was only five or six years older.

RASHBAM **25 They laid out their gifts.** They "made them ready" (compare OJPS). Packed into bags for the journey, the fruit had lost some of its luster.

IBN EZRA **24 Into Joseph's house.** Rather, he brought them "to" Joseph's house.

27 How is your aged father? Better, "Is your father well?" (OJPS), and even more precisely, "Is there health your father?" in place of the more standard "Is there health to your father?" Compare "Greetings to you and to your household and to all that is yours!" (1 Sam. 25:6), where "to" does not actually appear in the Hebrew text at all.

28 And they bowed and made obeisance. They put their heads on the ground, having already "made obeisance."

29 May God be gracious to you. The verb here does not match any known pattern; but the unusual form may be because of the guttural root letter.

KIMHI **24 Then the man brought the men into Joseph's house.** From the entryway, where they had been speaking with him.

25 They laid out their gifts to await Joseph's arrival at noon. They arranged them so as to be able to present them ceremonially. **For they had heard that they were to dine there.** They had heard this from the steward and from the people who were preparing the meal.

26 Presented. Most unusually, the א of the verb has a *dagesh*. **The gifts that they had brought with them into the house.** They were all in the same house, but remember that the houses of the great had many rooms. They were in the public part of the house, and he had been in the private rooms.

28 And they bowed and made obeisance. On behalf of their father.

29 Looking about, he saw his brother Benjamin. For they were all crowded around him.

NAHMANIDES had one animal's worth of money prepared in each bag. This sort of thing happens in markets and at storehouses all the time because of the crowds and the confusion.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **25 At noon.** The Hebrew word has a dual ending; the "two" parts of noon are the last moments of the morning and the first of the afternoon. The sun is precisely overhead for just an instant, but it is so high in the sky that ordinary people cannot distinguish this precisely (Gersonides).

28 And they bowed and made obeisance. They had bowed to him already in v. 26 when he came home; now they were acknowledging his courtesy in asking about their father (Abarbanel).

29 Is this your youngest brother of whom you spoke to me? This grown man? You made him sound like a 10-year-old (Abarbanel). **May God be gracious to you, my boy.** He did not want his previous, sarcastic remark to bring the evil eye upon him (Abarbanel). Since you are the only child left of your mother, may God be gracious and let your other brothers accept you (Sforno).

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NJPS 30With that, Joseph hurried out, for he was overcome with feeling toward his brother and was on the verge of tears; he went into a room and wept there. 31Then he washed his face, reappeared, and—now in control of himself—gave the order, "Serve the meal." 32They served him by himself, and them by themselves, and the Egyptians who ate with him by themselves; for the Egyptians could not dine with the Hebrews, since that would be abhorrent to the Egyptians. 33As they were seated by his direction, from the oldest in the order of his seniority to the youngest in the order of his youth, the men looked at one another in astonishment. 34Portions were served them from

שביעי

30 וַיְמַהֵר יוֹסֵף כִּי־נִכְמְרוּ רַחֲמָיו אֶל־אָחִיו
וַיְבַקֵּשׁ לִבְכּוֹת וַיָּבֹא הַחַדְרָה וַיֵּבְךְּ שָׁמָּה׃
31 וַיִּרְחַץ פָּנָיו וַיֵּצֵא וַיִּתְאַפַּק וַיֹּאמֶר שִׂימוּ
לָחֶם׃ 32 וַיָּשִׂימוּ לוֹ לְבַדּוֹ וְלָהֶם לְבַדָּם
וְלַמִּצְרִים הָאֹכְלִים אִתּוֹ לְבַדָּם כִּי לֹא
יוּכְלוּן הַמִּצְרִים לֶאֱכָל אֶת־הָעִבְרִים
לֶחֶם כִּי־תוֹעֵבָה הוּא לְמִצְרָיִם׃ 33 וַיֵּשְׁבוּ
לְפָנָיו הַבְּכֹר כִּבְכֹרָתוֹ וְהַצָּעִיר כִּצְעִרָתוֹ
וַיִּתְמְהוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים אִישׁ אֶל־רֵעֵהוּ׃
34 וַיִּשָּׂא מַשְׂאֹת מֵאֵת פָּנָיו אֲלֵהֶם וַתֵּרֶב

OJPS 30And Joseph made haste; for his heart yearned toward his brother; and he sought where to weep; and he entered into his chamber, and wept there. 31And he washed his face, and came out; and he refrained himself, and said: "Set on bread." 32And they set on for him by himself, and for them by themselves, and for the Egyptians, that did eat with him, by themselves; because the Egyptians might not eat bread with the Hebrews; for that is an abomination unto the Egyptians. 33And they sat before him, the firstborn according to his birthright, and the youngest according to his youth; and the men marveled one with another. 34And portions were taken unto them from

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ What does "They served him by himself, and them by themselves, and the Egyptians who ate with him by themselves" (v. 32) have to do with our story? ✦ Where does the idea that "the Egyptians could not dine with the Hebrews, since that would be abhorrent to the Egyptians" come from?

RASHI **30 For he was overcome with feeling.** He had asked Benjamin, "Do you have a full brother?" "I had one, but I do not know where he is." "Do you have children?" "I have 10." "And what are their names?" "Bela, Becher, Ashbel, Gera, Naaman, Ehi, Rosh, Muppim, Huppim, and Ard" [46:21]. "And what kind of names are those?" "They are all references to my brother and the troubles that overtook him: Bela, because he has been *swallowed* up among the nations; Becher, because he was my mother's *first-born*; Ashbel, because *God* sent him into *captivity*; Gera, because he had to *lodge* in a strange place; Naaman, because he was *pleasant* beyond compare; Ehi and Rosh, because he was my *brother* and my *head*; Muppim, because he learned *from the mouth* of his father; Huppim, because he did not see my *wedding canopy* and I did not see his; and Ard, because he *went down* among the nations" (see B. Sot. 36b). Immediately Joseph was overcome with emotion. Literally, his feelings "heated up"; compare "Our skin *glows* like an oven, with the fever of famine" (Lam. 5:10).

31 In control of himself. In Hebrew, it is a verb: "he restrained himself" (compare OJPS). He "exerted" himself to regain control. Compare "loosens the belt of the *mighty*" (Job 12:21); "his *protective* scales" (Job 41:7).

32 Since that would be abhorrent to the Egyptians. Who found it disgusting to eat with Hebrews; Onkelos gives an explanation. **[G]**

33 From the oldest in the order of his seniority to the youngest in the order of his youth. He tapped his goblet and called out, "Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun—sons of one mother—seat yourselves at the table in that order, which happens to be your birth order." And he did the same for all the rest of them. When he got to Benjamin he said, "This one has no mother, and neither do I. Let him sit with me."

34 Portions. Servings. **Several times that of anyone else.** His portion was precisely "five times" (OJPS) as much. He got a portion like that of his brothers, plus portions from

[G] He says that the Hebrews eat what the Egyptians worship.

RASHBAM **32 That would be abhorrent to the Egyptians.** To the Egyptians, eating with Mesopotamians would be disgusting (for the Egyptians were extremely arrogant, as we see from Isa. 30:7). "All shepherds are abhorrent to Egyptians" (46:34) because they found sheep repulsive. As Moses tells Pharaoh, "If we sacrifice that which is untouchable to the Egyptians before their very eyes, will they not stone us!" (Exod. 8:22). The stoning was a sign of their disgust; in just this way, "Shimei son of Gera came out hurling insults . . . and threw stones at David" (2 Sam. 16:5–6).

33 As they were seated by his direction. The Hebrew says merely that "they sat before him" (OJPS), but NJPS correctly intuits that Joseph had instructed that they be seated this way. **The men looked at one another in astonishment.** They had all been born in the space of seven years and there was no way to look at them and tell who was older and who was younger.

IBN EZRA **34 Portions were served them.** Rather, "gifts" were taken to them. **Several times that of anyone else.** Literally, "five times so much as all of theirs" (compare OJPS). But it is absurd to think that he got five times as much as all the rest of them put together.

KIMHI **31 Now in control of himself.** He stopped himself from crying.

32 They served him by himself. As was customary due to his position. **The Egyptians could not dine with the Hebrews, since that would be abhorrent to the Egyptians.** The Hebrews ate meat (see v. 16), and the Egyptians did not; they raised sheep only for milk and wool. The Sages say that they worshiped Aries and for that reason did not eat meat.

34 Portions were served them from his table; but Benjamin's portion was several times that of anyone else. They thought he was making up for the way he had treated them the first time, and that he was being especially nice to Benjamin to make up for demanding that he be separated from his father.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **31 Then he washed his face.** Because they were about to sit down and eat. He did not wash his face after crying in 42:24 because he would be with them only for a moment (Hizkuni). **Now in control of himself.** The Hebrew is a verb; the only other person in the Bible whom the narrative describes as doing this verb is Haman, in Esther 5:10 (Masorah).

32 They served him by himself. He did not want to sit with the brothers because he did not want them to realize that he was a Hebrew (Sforno).

33 The men looked at one another in astonishment. Not because "they were seated by his direction"; the Hebrew says merely that "they sat before him" (OJPS)—they sat that way on their own. They were astonished because he was eating by himself: "He is neither an Egyptian nor a Hebrew! What is he?" (Hizkuni).

34 Portions were served them from his table. All the dishes were brought to Joseph for his approval before being served (Hizkuni). **But Benjamin's portion was several times that of anyone else.** Literally, "five times" (OJPS). Each portion was meant to serve two. The

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NJPS his table; but Benjamin's portion was several times that of anyone else. And they drank their fill with him.

44 Then he instructed his house steward as follows, "Fill the men's bags with food, as much as they can carry, and put each one's money in the mouth of his bag. [2]Put my silver goblet in the mouth of the bag of the youngest one, together with his money for the rations." And he did as Joseph told him.

[3]With the first light of morning, the men were sent off with their pack animals. [4]They had just left the city and had not gone far, when Joseph said to his steward, "Up, go after the men! And when you overtake them, say to them, 'Why did you

OJPS before him; but Benjamin's portion was five times so much as any of theirs. And they drank, and were merry with him.

44 And he commanded the steward of his house, saying: "Fill the men's sacks with food, as much as they can carry, and put every man's money in his sack's mouth. [2]And put my goblet, the silver goblet, in the sack's mouth of the youngest, and his corn money." And he did according to the word that Joseph had spoken.

[3]As soon as the morning was light, the men were sent away, they and their asses. [4]And when they were gone out of the city, and were not yet far off, Joseph said unto his steward: "Up, follow after the men; and when thou dost overtake them, say unto them: Wherefore have ye rewarded

מַשְׂאֵת בִּנְיָמִן מִמַּשְׂאֹת כֻּלָּם חָמֵשׁ יָדוֹת וַיִּשְׁתּוּ וַיִּשְׁכְּרוּ עִמּוֹ׃

מד וַיְצַו אֶת־אֲשֶׁר עַל־בֵּיתוֹ לֵאמֹר מַלֵּא אֶת־אַמְתְּחֹת הָאֲנָשִׁים אֹכֶל כַּאֲשֶׁר יוּכְלוּן שְׂאֵת וְשִׂים כֶּסֶף־אִישׁ בְּפִי אַמְתַּחְתּוֹ׃ [2] וְאֶת־גְּבִיעִי גְּבִיעַ הַכֶּסֶף תָּשִׂים בְּפִי אַמְתַּחַת הַקָּטֹן וְאֶת כֶּסֶף שִׁבְרוֹ וַיַּעַשׂ כִּדְבַר יוֹסֵף אֲשֶׁר דִּבֵּר׃ [3] הַבֹּקֶר אוֹר וְהָאֲנָשִׁים שֻׁלְּחוּ הֵמָּה וַחֲמֹרֵיהֶם׃ [4] הֵם יָצְאוּ אֶת־הָעִיר לֹא הִרְחִיקוּ וְיוֹסֵף אָמַר לַאֲשֶׁר עַל־בֵּיתוֹ קוּם רְדֹף אַחֲרֵי הָאֲנָשִׁים וְהִשַּׂגְתָּם וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם לָמָּה שִׁלַּמְתֶּם רָעָה תַּחַת טוֹבָה׃

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Now that Joseph has punished his brothers, taken his revenge, had them bring Benjamin to Egypt, seen the dream of the 11 stars fulfilled, and sat down to eat with his brothers, why must he still put them through the ordeal of the goblet (v. 2)? ✦ Why did Joseph involve "the youngest one" in this ordeal? Benjamin had never done him any wrong and was his own full brother. ✦ What was the point of putting their money back in their sacks while setting up the trick with the goblet? ✦ Why did Joseph say, "When you overtake them, say to them" (v. 4)? Did he think the man would say this *before* he overtook them?

RASHI Joseph, Asenath, Manasseh, and Ephraim. **[H] And they drank their fill with him.** "Drinking" in the sense of drinking alcohol. They had not drunk wine since the day they sold him, and neither had he. But that day they all drank.

44:2 My silver goblet. A "goblet" is a glass with a tall stem.

[H] See 41:50–52.

RASHBAM 44:3 With the first light of morning. *Or* here is not a noun, "light," but a verb, "it grew light" (compare OJPS): "how my eyes *lit up*" (1 Sam. 14:29). "How *fair* are your tents, O Jacob" (Num. 24:5) is similarly a verb in the Hebrew.

IBN EZRA 44:2 My silver goblet. This is a kind of cup.

KIMHI 44:1 Then he instructed his house steward as follows. Few of these details require commentary. Once again, Joseph is doing his best to aggravate them without doing them any actual harm. He knew precisely what he was doing.

NAHMANIDES 44:1 As much as they can carry. Which would be more than they had paid for. **And put each one's money in the mouth of his bag.** While they are watching. The steward told them, "My boss knows that he mistreated you, and he wants to make it up to you." For if he had done it secretly, as he did the first time, they would have had an excuse with the goblet—however the money had gotten there would be how the goblet got there, too. But now they knew that they had been given their money back, along with as much grain as they could carry. If they had not known, he might have told them that the money was another "treasure," but he would not be able to say that about the goblet. Who "can contend with what is stronger than he" (Eccles. 6:10)? You must realize that, because there were so many buyers from all over Egypt, amid tremendous confusion, everyone dropped off their sacks and their money with the distributor. He would measure out grain based on the amount of money they had dropped off, and they would take what they were given. After all, "a king's command is authoritative, and none can say to him, 'What are you doing?'" (Eccles. 8:4). And in this case he certainly dealt honestly. So they had taken the bags the first time without opening them, and they did the same this time.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS 10 brothers got five portions between them, one for every two of them, while Benjamin got a portion to himself, and perhaps even a slightly bigger one—but certainly not five times bigger (Gersonides). **And they drank their fill with him.** Since the rules about drinking gentile wine had not yet been decreed (Hizkuni). Literally, "they drank and got drunk." For he served them with the king's finest wines, which they were not used to, and they had not taken the precaution of drinking their fill before the meal. As Prov. 23:1 counsels, "When you sit down to dine with a ruler, consider well who is before you" (Sforno).

44:1 Put each one's money in the mouth of his bag. The point of this test was the goblet. But he was afraid the brothers might think Benjamin really had stolen it, just as his mother Rachel "had stolen her father's household idols" (31:19). When they saw the money in their sacks, they would realize that Benjamin had not stolen the goblet either (Abarbanel).

2 Put my silver goblet in the mouth of the bag of the youngest one. He did not actually recognize Benjamin, having left before Benjamin's beard came in. So he thought, "Perhaps they have brought me some foundling? Let's see whether they treat him like a brother or abandon him" (Hizkuni).

3 With the first light of morning, the men were sent off with their pack animals. Ordinarily people transporting grain would get underway while it was still quite dark. But Joseph did not let them leave until it was light. He was afraid they might kill the steward he was going to send after them if he encountered them in the dark when there was no one else on the roads (Hizkuni). Joseph sent them off as early as possible because he wanted to get the whole incident over with and reveal himself to his brothers before the Egyptians realized what was happening (Abarbanel).

4 His steward. According to Genesis Rabbah, this was his son Manasseh. He was paid back for causing them to rend their clothes (see v. 13) by having his own tribe rent in half—one on one side of the Jordan and one on the other (Hizkuni).

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NJPS repay good with evil? [5]It is the very one from which my master drinks and which he uses for divination. It was a wicked thing for you to do!'"

[6]He overtook them and spoke those words to them. [7]And they said to him, "Why does my lord say such things? Far be it from your servants to do anything of the kind! [8]Here we brought back to you from the land of Canaan the money that we found in the mouths of our bags. How then could we have stolen any silver or gold from your master's house! [9]Whichever of your servants it is found with shall die; the rest of us, moreover, shall become slaves to my lord." [10]He replied, "Although what you are proposing is right, only the one with whom it is found shall be my slave; but the rest of you shall go free."

OJPS evil for good? [5]Is not this it in which my lord drinketh, and whereby he indeed divineth? ye have done evil in so doing."

[6]And he overtook them, and he spoke unto them these words. [7]And they said unto him: "Wherefore speaketh my lord such words as these? Far be it from thy servants that they should do such a thing. [8]Behold, the money, which we found in our sacks' mouths, we brought back unto thee out of the land of Canaan; how then should we steal out of thy lord's house silver or gold? [9]With whomsoever of thy servants it be found, let him die, and we also will be my lord's bondmen." [10]And he said: "Now also let it be according unto your words: he with whom it is found shall be my bondman; and ye shall be blameless."

5 הֲלוֹא זֶה אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁתֶּה אֲדֹנִי בּוֹ וְהוּא
נַחֵשׁ יְנַחֵשׁ בּוֹ הֲרֵעֹתֶם אֲשֶׁר עֲשִׂיתֶם׃
6 וַיַּשֵּׂג וַיְדַבֵּר אֲלֵהֶם אֶת־הַדְּבָרִים
הָאֵלֶּה׃ 7 וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵלָיו לָמָּה יְדַבֵּר אֲדֹנִי
כַּדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה חָלִילָה לַעֲבָדֶיךָ מֵעֲשׂוֹת
כַּדָּבָר הַזֶּה׃ 8 הֵן כֶּסֶף אֲשֶׁר מָצָאנוּ בְּפִי
אַמְתְּחֹתֵינוּ הֱשִׁיבֹנוּ אֵלֶיךָ מֵאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן
וְאֵיךְ נִגְנֹב מִבֵּית אֲדֹנֶיךָ כֶּסֶף אוֹ זָהָב׃
9 אֲשֶׁר יִמָּצֵא אִתּוֹ מֵעֲבָדֶיךָ וָמֵת וְגַם־
אֲנַחְנוּ נִהְיֶה לַאדֹנִי לַעֲבָדִים׃ 10 וַיֹּאמֶר
גַּם־עַתָּה כִּדְבָרֵיכֶם כֵּן־הוּא אֲשֶׁר יִמָּצֵא
אִתּוֹ יִהְיֶה־לִּי עֶבֶד וְאַתֶּם תִּהְיוּ נְקִיִּם׃

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ What is the strange comment saying that Joseph uses the goblet "for divination" (v. 5) about? ✦ Why did the steward say, "Let it be according unto your words" (v. 10; see OJPS), when he did not in fact act according to their words?

RASHI **7 Far be it from your servants.** A profanation. It would be disgraceful. The Talmud uses this expression frequently.

8 Here we brought back to you from the land of Canaan the money that we found in the mouths of our bags. How then could we have stolen any silver or gold from your master's house! This is one of the 10 occurrences in the Bible of a rabbinic-style argument *a fortiori*. They are all listed in Genesis Rabbah. **[I]**

10 Although what you are proposing is right. The Hebrew says, "Let it be according unto your words" (OJPS), but NJPS has the sense of the idiom here. "It's true,

[I] Rashi and Genesis Rabbah both say "in the Torah," but they are from throughout the Bible. As often with such lists in rabbinic literature, there is some confusion about the contents; other verses listed there are Exod. 6:12, Num. 12:14, Deut. 31:27, 1 Sam. 23:3, Jer. 12:5, Ezek. 15:5, Prov. 11:31, and Esther 9:12, making a total of nine (but there are two examples in Jer. 12:5). Alternatively, there are *five* such verses, all in the Torah itself; see also 4:24.

KIMHI **5 And which he uses for divination.** Possibly meaning rather that he took the theft of the goblet he drank from as a bad omen.

10 What you are proposing is right. Rather, "your words are right." Some take this to mean, "I believe what you told me about the money you brought back; I am sure you are honest. Nevertheless, the one with whom the goblet is found" (and so forth).

NAHMANIDES **5 It is the very one from which my master drinks.** Notice that he does not say "the very goblet." They too will reply by asking how they could have stolen "any silver or gold" (v. 8) and agreeing that whoever "it" is found with shall die (v. 9). So saying "the very one from which my master drinks" is just a way of trying to get them to feel guilty. Obviously someone who steals the king's cup is displaying contempt for the monarchy, and no amount of bribery can get you out of that kind of situation. **And which he uses for divination.** Rather, "and about which he uses divination." He does not want anyone else drinking out of his cup, and consulted diviners about it (which is what Joseph tells them in v. 15). He is telling them that Joseph knew from the diviners that they had stolen it. That is why he pursued them rather than any of the other purchasers who had been in the building. All this was to prevent them from realizing that he had arranged the whole episode. That is also why he began his search with the oldest and ended with the youngest (v. 12).

10 Although what you are proposing is right. What the Hebrew literally says—"now also" (OJPS)—does not sit well with Rashi's explanation. Perhaps Rashi means that the steward is saying not "only the one with whom it is found shall be my slave," but "the one with whom it is found shall only be my slave," but he shall not die. However, since Joseph says, "Far be it from me to act thus!" (v. 17), the

RASHBAM **5 Which he uses for divination.** Evidently Joseph had pretended that he had magical ways of obtaining knowledge, perhaps using this goblet as a prop. But some take the Hebrew to mean not "he divines *by means* of it" (compare OJPS) but "he divines *about* it"—he had divined who stole it from him. Note that when Joseph tells them, "Do you not know that a man like me practices divination?" (v. 15), he says nothing about divining *by means of* the goblet.

10 Although what you are proposing is right. Since you are all partners, and business partners are responsible for each

IBN EZRA **5 Which he uses for divination.** Rather, "he tested you with it" to see whether you were thieves. Compare Laban's use of the word in 30:27. It has the same meaning here in v. 15. The point was to have the steward frighten them: "Why weren't you afraid to do this? I put the silver goblet in front of you to test you, and looked away to give you an opportunity to take it." Jonah ibn Janah, however, reads our phrase as "about which he has used divination," that is, "he asked the diviners about it." In that case, "a man like me practices divination" (v. 15) would mean "a man of my sort has diviners in his employ." Some claim that the cup was engraved and that Joseph made a show of looking into it in front of his brothers and saying, "This one is the oldest… this one was born next."

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **5 It is the very one from which my master drinks.** So you should have known it would be missed before you could get very far (Bekhor Shor). **And which he uses for divination.** Which should have stopped you from stealing even if it were something that would not be missed right away (Bekhor Shor). He considered that cup an omen of his greatness; having it stolen was a bad omen (Abarbanel). **It was a wicked thing for you to do!** Rather, "you have done badly"—you are not even good at stealing. You took something that would be missed right away! (Abarbanel).

10 Although what you are proposing is right. Rather, "Now, according to your words, so shall *he* [alone] be." Only Benjamin shall be my slave (Bekhor Shor). I learned the following about this from my father and teacher, may he rest in Paradise. The man is saying,

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NJPS [11]So each one hastened to lower his bag to the ground, and each one opened his bag. [12]He searched, beginning with the oldest and ending with the youngest; and the goblet turned up in Benjamin's bag. [13]At this they rent their clothes. Each reloaded his pack animal, and they returned to the city.

[14]When Judah and his brothers re-entered the house of Joseph, who was still there, they threw themselves on the ground before him. [15]Joseph said to them, "What is this deed that you have done? Do you not know that a man like me practices divination?" [16]Judah replied, "What can we say to my lord? How can we plead, how can we prove our innocence? God has uncovered the crime of your servants. Here we are, then, slaves of my lord, the rest

OJPS [11]Then they hastened, and took down every man his sack to the ground, and opened every man his sack. [12]And he searched, beginning at the eldest, and leaving off at the youngest; and the goblet was found in Benjamin's sack. [13]And they rent their clothes, and laded every man his ass, and returned to the city.

[14]And Judah and his brethren came to Joseph's house, and he was yet there; and they fell before him on the ground. [15]And Joseph said unto them: "What deed is this that ye have done? know ye not that such a man as I will indeed divine?" [16]And Judah said: "What shall we say unto my lord? what shall we speak? or how shall we clear ourselves? God hath found out the iniquity of thy servants; behold, we are my

11 וַיְמַהֲרוּ וַיּוֹרִדוּ אִישׁ אֶת־אַמְתַּחְתּוֹ
אָרְצָה וַיִּפְתְּחוּ אִישׁ אַמְתַּחְתּוֹ׃ 12 וַיְחַפֵּשׂ
בַּגָּדוֹל הֵחֵל וּבַקָּטֹן וַתִּמָּצֵא הַגָּבִיעַ
בְּאַמְתַּחַת בִּנְיָמִן׃ 13 וַיִּקְרְעוּ שִׂמְלֹתָם
וַיַּעֲמֹס אִישׁ עַל־חֲמֹרוֹ וַיָּשֻׁבוּ הָעִירָה׃
14 וַיָּבֹא יְהוּדָה וְאֶחָיו בֵּיתָה יוֹסֵף וְהוּא ✦ עדיין
עוֹדֶנּוּ שָׁם וַיִּפְּלוּ לְפָנָיו אָרְצָה׃ 15 וַיֹּאמֶר
לָהֶם יוֹסֵף מֶה־הַמַּעֲשֶׂה הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר
עֲשִׂיתֶם הֲלוֹא יְדַעְתֶּם כִּי־נַחֵשׁ יְנַחֵשׁ
אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר כָּמֹנִי׃ 16 וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוּדָה מַה־
נֹּאמַר לַאדֹנִי מַה־נְּדַבֵּר וּמַה־נִּצְטַדָּק
הָאֱלֹהִים מָצָא אֶת־עֲוֹן עֲבָדֶיךָ הִנֶּנּוּ

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Once the steward said, "The rest of you shall go free," why did Judah insist, "Here we are, then, slaves of my lord, the rest of us as much as he in whose possession the goblet was found" (v. 16)?

RASHI when one member of a group of 10 is found with stolen property, all of them should be arrested." **Only the one with whom it is found shall be my slave.** But I am not going to treat you according to the strict letter of the law.

12 Beginning with the oldest. So they would not realize that he already knew where it was.

13 Each reloaded his pack animal. They were strong men and did not need each other's help to reload. **And they returned to the city.** It does not even record the name of the city, though it was the capital. But as far as they were concerned, it might have been a town barely big enough to send troops to war.

14 Joseph, who was still there. He had been waiting for them.

15 Do you not know that a man like me practices divination? Do you not realize that a man as important as I am knows how to figure out, using my knowledge, intellect, and understanding, that it was you who stole the goblet?

16 How can we prove our innocence? Note that the ת of the Hitpael assimilates to

RASHBAM other's infractions. Nonetheless, I do not want to push things that far. **Only the one with whom it is found shall be my slave.**

15 Do you not know that a man like me practices divination? This is indeed the kind of thing rulers do: "For the king of Babylon has stood at the fork of the road, where two roads branch off, to perform divination: He has shaken arrows, consulted teraphim, and inspected the liver" (Ezek. 21:26). — So I know who is stealing my money!

IBN EZRA **16 God has uncovered the crime of your servants.** He is speaking idiomatically: the crime has been uncovered. "We indeed committed a crime, but we

KIMHI **12 Beginning with the oldest and ending with the youngest.** Which he knew because of how Joseph had seated them at the meal.

16 How can we prove our innocence? We cannot prove our innocence in this, as we could with the money. **God has uncovered the crime of your servants.** "If a righteous man abandons his righteousness and does wrong, I put a stumbling block before him" (Ezek. 3:20).

NAHMANIDES steward cannot mean that they all are guilty of a theft committed by just one of them. "I am the judge of all the land! How could I perpetrate such an injustice?" There is no collective guilt when one man in a group of 10 has been found with stolen property unless it can be proved that they all conspired to steal it. But of course in our story he has already accused them as a group: "Why did you repay good with evil?" (v. 4); "It was a wicked thing for you to do!" (v. 5). They proclaim their innocence by announcing in v. 9 that the actual thief should die, and the rest, who are innocent, should become slaves. It is as much as to say that the actual thief was the only one who knew about the theft. If they were all involved, why should just one man die? They would all be deserving of the same punishment, whether death or enslavement. They, however, are arguing that the others do not know about the theft and are invoking punishment on themselves even though they are innocent. So the steward is saying to them, "Now also" (OJPS)—even despite what you have just said—**only the one with whom it is found shall be my slave.** I am interested in making him pay for his crime, not in killing him. **But the rest of you shall go free.** Perhaps, as "according to your words" (compare OJPS), you really are innocent. — Or he may be saying, "Even though what you are proposing is *not* right, let it be as you say." It would be like Rahab saying to the spies, "Let it be as you say" (Josh. 2:21). That, I think, is the correct interpretation. Genesis Rabbah here accords with my understanding, not Rashi's. But perhaps we can fit Rashi's interpretation to the text by taking Joseph's "Far be it from me" (v. 17) to mean, "Far be it from me to treat you more harshly than my steward, who has already acquitted you. The rest of you shall go free; I will 'confirm the word of My servant' [Isa. 44:26]."

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS "Even now, when I suspect that one of you has stolen, 'let it be according unto your words' [OJPS]—you are honest men. If I find the stolen object in the hands of one of you, I will still not suspect that all of you were involved. Only the one who stole it will be punished." That is a really beautiful explanation (Gersonides).

12 He searched, beginning with the oldest and ending with the youngest; and the goblet turned up in Benjamin's bag. But the money aroused no suspicion, since merchants always carry plenty of money with them (Bekhor Shor).

16 God has uncovered the crime of your servants. The hidden crime of selling our brother (Abarbanel). We are not guilty of this crime; we have committed no wrong against you at all. But God has arranged for you to punish us for a crime we committed long

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NJPS of us as much as he in whose possession the goblet was found." 17But he replied, "Far be it from me to act thus! Only he in whose possession the goblet was found shall be my slave; the rest of you go back in peace to your father."

עֲבָדִים֙ לַאדֹנִ֔י גַּם־אֲנַ֖חְנוּ גַּם אֲשֶׁר־נִמְצָ֣א הַגָּבִ֔יעַ בְּיָדֹ֑ו׃ 17 וַיֹּ֣אמֶר חָלִ֔ילָה לִ֥י מֵעֲשֹׂ֖ות זֹ֣את הָאִ֑ישׁ אֲשֶׁר֩ נִמְצָ֨א הַגָּבִ֜יעַ בְּיָדֹ֗ו הֽוּא־יִהְיֶה־לִּ֤י עָבֶד֙ וְאַתֶּ֔ם עֲל֥וּ לְשָׁלֹ֖ום אֶל־אֲבִיכֶֽם׃ פ

OJPS lord's bondmen, both we, and he also in whose hand the cup is found." 17And he said: "Far be it from me that I should do so; the man in whose hand the goblet is found, he shall be my bondman; but as for you, get you up in peace unto your father."

RASHI the צ by becoming ט; they are reversed by metathesis, as is always the case when the first root letter of a Hitpael is a sibilant. **God has uncovered the crime of your servants.** We know that we did no wrong. But all this was brought on us by the Holy One, who has found a way to collect the debt we owe him.

IBN EZRA thought it had long been forgotten. Today, it has been found again." Or perhaps he means "God has laid bare the *punishment*" that your servants will receive, as the word is used in "My punishment is too great to bear!" (4:13).

KIMHI **17 The rest of you go back in peace to your father.** Who is waiting for you to bring him the grain.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS ago (Sforno). **Here we are, then, slaves of my lord, the rest of us as much as he in whose possession the goblet was found.** They had said in v. 9 that he should die; now they were afraid he really would be put to death and asked that he only be enslaved, like the rest of them (Hizkuni). "We are slaves" to pay us back for selling our brother into slavery, just as much as the brother who was not guilty of that crime. — Notice that they do not say "the one who stole the goblet"; they are perfectly aware that he is innocent (Abarbanel).

17 Far be it from me to act thus! To frame you, as you are implying I have done (Abarbanel). To punish you for some crime you committed way back when (Sforno). **Only he in whose possession the goblet was found shall be my slave.** I too admit that I do not know whether he stole it or not; but it was found in his possession. He shall be my slave rather than suffer the death penalty to which he is liable (Abarbanel). I will not punish you for the crime you once committed; I will punish and take as my slave only the one who has sinned now (Sforno).

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VA-YIGGASH

ויגש

NJPS [18]Then Judah went up to him and said, "Please, my lord, let your servant appeal to my lord, and do not be impatient with your servant, you who are the equal of Pharaoh. [19]My lord asked his servants, 'Have you a father or another

[18] וַיִּגַּשׁ אֵלָיו יְהוּדָה וַיֹּאמֶר בִּי אֲדֹנִי יְדַבֶּר־נָא עַבְדְּךָ דָבָר בְּאָזְנֵי אֲדֹנִי וְאַל־יִחַר אַפְּךָ בְּעַבְדֶּךָ כִּי כָמוֹךָ כְּפַרְעֹה׃ [19] אֲדֹנִי שָׁאַל אֶת־עֲבָדָיו לֵאמֹר הֲיֵשׁ־לָכֶם אָב

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ "Then Judah went up to him" (v .18)—but why? Judah had already been standing before him and speaking with him. ✦ Why does Judah address him with the words "Please, my lord"? ✦ Why must Judah speak "in my lord's ears" (see OJPS)? What has he been speaking into up until now, if not Joseph's ears? ✦ Why is Judah afraid that Joseph might "be impatient with your servant"? ✦ What is the point of calling Joseph "the equal of Pharaoh," which Judah has never previously done when speaking to him? ✦ How could Judah dare to say that Joseph asked, "Have you a father or another brother?" (v. 19), when he in fact never asked them anything of the kind?

RASHI **18 Please, my lord, let your servant appeal to my lord.** Literally, let me speak "a word in my lord's ears" (OJPS). Let my words go into your ears. **And do not be impatient.** Rather, "do not get angry" (compare OJPS). We learn from this that Judah now spoke harshly to Joseph. **You who are the equal of Pharaoh.** "I consider you a king"—that is the straightforward sense of the phrase. Midrashically it implies: you will eventually be punished on Benjamin's account with leprosy, just as Pharaoh was punished for detaining my great-grandmother Sarah for just one night. Another reading: Pharaoh issues decrees but cannot enforce them, makes promises but does not keep them, and you are his equal. You said you wanted to set your eyes on Benjamin. Is this your idea of "setting eyes" on someone? Another reading: If you annoy me any further, I will kill you and your master too.

19 My lord asked his servants. You have been trying to frame us since day one. Why did you have to ask us all these questions? Were we trying to marry your daughter? Were you thinking of marrying our sister? And nevertheless—

KIMHI **18 You who are the equal of Pharaoh.** The Hebrew idiom "like X, like Y" is used to equate two things, as in "Layman and priest shall fare alike, slave and master, handmaid and mistress, buyer and seller, lender and borrower, creditor and debtor" (Isa. 24:2). Judah is saying, "You rule like Pharaoh and Pharaoh is like you, so I am as afraid of speaking before you as I would be before Pharaoh. But the distress that has found us now is so great that I cannot keep silent. Please do not be angry at anything your servant says. For originally you made up accusations against us, something you did not do against any of the others who came down to buy grain."

19 My lord asked his servants. He reminded him of the whole earlier conversation, trying to move him to pity the old man and not hold on to the boy.

NAHMANIDES **18 Let your servant appeal to my lord.** Rather, let your servant "speak a word" (OJPS). He is telling him that he has just a small matter to discuss with him, nothing burdensome. The matter he wants to discuss with him is, in my opinion, that he is trying to talk him into exchanging Benjamin for himself. That is all he asks for. All the rest of what he says is merely an attempt to persuade him. **And do not be impatient with your servant.** Rather, "do not be angry with your servant" (see OJPS) about my speaking before you. **You who are the equal of Pharaoh.** So I speak before you with great fear, just as I would if I were speaking before Pharaoh.

19 My lord asked his servants. I don't understand why Judah spends such a long time reminding Joseph of what had previously passed between them. The rabbinic explanation that Judah was asking Joseph whether his current behavior really amounted to "keeping an eye on" Benjamin certainly does not explain it. A ruler who demands that someone be brought before him certainly does not mean to give him blanket permission for whatever wrongs he might do, all the more so in this case, where he has stolen the goblet from the royal palace. And he did originally "keep an eye" on Benjamin with the good wish, "May God be gracious to you, my boy" (43:29). He even invited them all to a feast that he held in Benjamin's honor at the royal palace. He had given them loads of things, including as much grain as they could carry home, which was much more than they had paid for (see my comments to v. 1). What else was Joseph supposed to do? But I think there is more here than meets the eye. Judah is trying to play on his emotions. Judah took Joseph's claim to be a God-fearing man (see 42:18) seriously, as well as his behavior in mollifying them for the distress he had caused them. **[A]** Here is what is going on in this story: Judah says, "We were forced by my lord's questions to tell my lord about this boy. But we did not agree to bring him down here as you originally commanded. We told you that the boy could not leave his father. But with our lives at stake we did bring the boy

[A] See 43:23.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **18 Then Judah went up to him.** Judah knew that Joseph had put the goblet in Benjamin's bag, but was afraid to make this accusation out loud (Bekhor Shor). Judah went up to him because, unlike Joseph in 45:1, he could not "have everyone withdraw" (Hizkuni). Since Judah was going to propose that he punish the wrong man—and he had just said, "Far be it from me to act thus!" (v. 17)—Judah wanted to propose this deal to him privately (Abarbanel). "Far be it from me to act thus!" meant that Joseph wanted to cause no harm, and Judah intended to point out that he *would* be causing harm (Sforno). **You who are the equal of Pharaoh.** I must have it out with you, because there is no one over your head to whom I can complain, not even Pharaoh (Bekhor Shor). And at the beginning of the king's reign they have him take an oath to uphold the laws of the land (Hizkuni). You are at the same rank as Pharaoh; like him, you can do whatever you want (Gersonides).

19 My lord asked his servants. Rather, "Did my lord ask his servants" these questions? No, we volunteered all this information. So we are not making up what we are saying now (Abarbanel).

OJPS [18]Then Judah came near unto him, and said: "Oh my lord, let thy servant, I pray thee, speak a word in my lord's ears, and let not thine anger burn against thy servant; for thou art even as Pharaoh. [19]My lord asked his servants, saying: Have ye a

RASHBAM **18 You who are the equal of Pharaoh.** You are like a king, and I fear your wrath.

19 My lord asked. You are the reason we brought him down here, and it would be inappropriate for you to hinder him from returning.

IBN EZRA **18 You who are the equal of Pharaoh.** Literally, "like you, like Pharaoh"—you are like the king and the king is like you. That is always the meaning of the Hebrew idiom "like X, like Y." Compare "I will do what you do; my troops shall be your troops, my horses shall be your horses" (1 Kings 22:4). It is just a shorthand way of saying it.

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NJPS brother?' [20]We told my lord, 'We have an old father, and there is a child of his old age, the youngest; his full brother is dead, so that he alone is left of his mother, and his father dotes on him.' [21]Then you said to your servants, 'Bring him down to me, that I may set eyes on him.' [22]We said to my lord, 'The boy cannot leave his father; if he were to leave him, his father would die.' [23]But you said to your servants, 'Unless your youngest brother comes down with you, do not let me see your faces.'

אוֹ־אָח׃ [20] וַנֹּאמֶר אֶל־אֲדֹנִי יֶשׁ־לָנוּ אָב זָקֵן וְיֶלֶד זְקֻנִים קָטֹן וְאָחִיו מֵת וַיִּוָּתֵר הוּא לְבַדּוֹ לְאִמּוֹ וְאָבִיו אֲהֵבוֹ׃ [21] וַתֹּאמֶר אֶל־עֲבָדֶיךָ הוֹרְדֻהוּ אֵלָי וְאָשִׂימָה עֵינִי עָלָיו׃ [22] וַנֹּאמֶר אֶל־אֲדֹנִי לֹא־יוּכַל הַנַּעַר לַעֲזֹב אֶת־אָבִיו וְעָזַב אֶת־אָבִיו וָמֵת׃ [23] וַתֹּאמֶר אֶל־עֲבָדֶיךָ אִם־לֹא יֵרֵד אֲחִיכֶם הַקָּטֹן אִתְּכֶם לֹא תֹסִפוּן לִרְאוֹת פָּנָי׃

OJPS father, or a brother? [20]And we said unto my lord: We have a father, an old man, and a child of his old age, a little one; and his brother is dead, and he alone is left of his mother, and his father loveth him. [21]And thou saidst unto thy servants: Bring him down unto me, that I may set mine eyes upon him. [22]And we said unto my lord: The lad cannot leave his father; for if he should leave his father, his father would die. [23]And thou saidst unto thy servants: Except your youngest brother come down with you, ye shall see my face no more.

RASHI **20 We told my lord.** We withheld nothing from you. **His full brother is dead.** Here, out of fear, Judah utters a lie. He thought, "If I tell him the boy's brother is still living, he will tell us, 'Bring him to me.'" **So that he alone is left of his mother.** He has no other brothers from that same mother.

22 If he were to leave him, his father would die. "His father" is not in the Hebrew, which does not specify who would die. Judah is saying, "We were afraid that if he were to leave his father, he himself would die on the journey. That is what happened to his mother."

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ What good did it do for Judah to tell this whole long story? If he wanted to play on Joseph's emotions, wouldn't it have been enough for him simply to say, "The boy cannot leave his father; if he were to leave him, his father would die" (v. 22)? ✦ For that matter, the Hebrew says merely "*he* would die." To whom does that pronoun really refer? Everything points to the father, but why not say so?

RASHBAM **21 That I may set eyes on him.** Even if he committed some transgression, it would be disgraceful for the ruler of the land to break his promise.

22 His father would die. The translations understand correctly.

IBN EZRA **20 An old father.** Since the oldest of the sons was just 45, their father might still be relatively young.

21 That I may set eyes on him. So I can see him.

22 If he were to leave him, his father would die. The Hebrew, of course, says merely "*he* would die." Why is this verse not included in the famous passage about the five "undecidable" verses in the Torah? **[A]** The verse leaves unclear who "he" is, just as when the redeemer said to Boaz, "Acquire for yourself," and "he" drew off his sandal (Ruth 4:8). So it should certainly have been included.

[A] See B. Yoma 52a–b for this passage, originally found in the Mekilta.

NAHMANIDES down because of 'the fever of famine' [Lam. 5:10]. For you told us, 'Unless your youngest brother comes down with you, do not let me see your faces' [v. 23]. Our father would not agree to let us come down to get a bit of food until we were all in grave danger. Only then, worried and frightened, would he agree. Now, when he sees that the boy is not with us, he will die embittered. Let my supplication, therefore, come before you—to have pity on us and on the old man, and take me instead of the boy as a slave forever. I am in any case superior to him, and you will be acting righteously." That is the point of this whole section. So when Judah tells him in v. 31, "your servants will send the white head of your servant our father down to Sheol in grief," it may be a polite way of telling Joseph, "*You* will send the white head of your servant our father down to Sheol in grief." (Exod. 5:16 has a similar expression.) **[B]** The rabbinic idea that Judah is asking Joseph why he is not properly "keeping an eye" on Benjamin implies that "you who are the equal of Pharaoh" (v. 18) is a challenge demanding that Joseph keep his word about the test he had put them through. **[C]** "You forced us, under tremendous pressure, to bring him down here." Judah was afraid to say any of this more explicitly, but implicit in his words is the accusation that Joseph had used the goblet to frame them. The midrash that Judah asked Joseph whether he thought they were trying to marry into the family **[D]** is the rabbinic way of saying that Judah was implicitly accusing Joseph.

21 That I may set eyes on him. Despite Ibn Ezra, I cannot find the expression "to set eyes" on someone meaning "to see him" (and nothing more) used anywhere in the Bible. E.g., "I will look upon them favorably" (Jer. 24:6); "Take him and look after him; do him no harm" (Jer. 39:12). So Joseph certainly swore to them that he would treat Benjamin well and take care of him, even if the text does not tell us so explicitly. The original story does not mention any of the things that Judah is saying now, just as Judah does not now mention Joseph's imprisoning Simeon or accusing them of being spies (whether out of politeness or out of fear).

22 If he were to leave him, his father would die. If Ibn Ezra were correct that "his father" would die (as the translations accept), **[E]** the verse should read, "The father cannot leave his boy; if the father were to leave his son, he would die." Or: "We cannot have the boy leave his father." They would not have pinned the responsibility on the boy, since they are treating him as if he could not "tell the difference between good and bad" (2 Sam. 19:36). In fact, "The boy cannot leave his father" because he is so young, "a child that is dandled" (Jer. 31:20) on his loving father's lap. If he were to leave him and take to the road, the *boy* would die.

[B] See the comments of Rashbam and Ibn Ezra there. **[C]** This last phrase is a guess at a word whose meaning is not evident. **[D]** See Rashi's comment. **[E]** This is Rashbam's comment, not Ibn Ezra's, in the texts we currently have.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **20 His father dotes on him.** More than on any of the rest of us. That is why we originally did not bring him down here. It is not that we sent him on some spy mission, as you think (Sforno).

21 Then you said to your servants, "Bring him down to me, that I may set eyes on him." Another possible reading of this verse: "Then you said to your servants, 'Bring him down to me.' But I [Judah] would keep an eye on him," since I guaranteed his return (Hizkuni). You told us specifically, "I will keep an eye on him," so that his father need not worry about letting him come here (Sforno).

22 If he were to leave him, his father would die. On the day he sees that the boy is not with us, he will die. But that does not seem to bother you. What is it that makes you need this particular boy? Everything points to the fact that you set up this incident because you want to keep the boy here—and we have no idea why (Bekhor Shor).

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NJPS 24When we came back to your servant my father, we reported my lord's words to him.

25"Later our father said, 'Go back and procure some food for us.' 26We answered, 'We cannot go down; only if our youngest brother is with us can we go down, for we may not show our faces to the man unless our youngest brother is with us.' 27Your servant my father said to us, 'As you know, my wife bore me two sons. 28But one is gone from me, and I said: Alas, he was torn by a beast! And I have not seen him since. 29If you take this one from me, too, and he meets with disaster, you will send my white head down to Sheol in sorrow.'

30"Now, if I come to your servant my father and the boy is not with us—since his own life is so bound up with his— 31when he sees that the boy is not with us, he will die, and your servants will send the white head of your servant our father down to Sheol in grief. 32Now your servant has

OJPS 24And it came to pass when we came up unto thy servant my father, we told him the words of my lord.

25And our father said: Go again, buy us a little food. 26And we said: We cannot go down; if our youngest brother be with us, then will we go down; for we may not see the man's face, except our youngest brother be with us. 27And thy servant my father said unto us: Ye know that my wife bore me two sons; 28and the one went out from me, and I said: Surely he is torn in pieces; and I have not seen him since; 29and if ye take this one also from me, and harm befall him, ye will bring down my gray hairs with sorrow to the grave.

30Now therefore when I come to thy servant my father, and the lad is not with us; seeing that his soul is bound up with the lad's soul; 31it will come to pass, when he seeth that the lad is not with us, that he will die; and thy servants will bring down the gray hairs of thy servant our father with sorrow to the grave. 32For thy servant

24 וַיְהִי֙ כִּ֣י עָלִ֔ינוּ אֶל־עַבְדְּךָ֖ אָבִ֑י וַנַּגֶּד־לוֹ֙
אֶת דִּבְרֵ֣י אֲדֹנִ֔י׃
25 וַיֹּ֣אמֶר אָבִ֔ינוּ שֻׁ֖בוּ שִׁבְרוּ־לָ֥נוּ מְעַט־
אֹֽכֶל׃ 26 וַנֹּ֣אמֶר לֹ֣א נוּכַ֔ל לָרֶ֑דֶת אִם־יֵ֤שׁ
אָחִ֙ינוּ֙ הַקָּטֹ֔ן אִתָּ֖נוּ וְיָרַ֣דְנוּ כִּי־לֹ֣א נוּכַ֔ל
לִרְא֥וֹת פְּנֵ֖י הָאִ֑ישׁ וְאָחִ֙ינוּ֙ הַקָּטֹ֔ן אֵינֶ֖נּוּ
אִתָּֽנוּ׃ 27 וַיֹּ֣אמֶר עַבְדְּךָ֣ אָבִ֔י אֵלֵ֖ינוּ אַתֶּ֣ם
יְדַעְתֶּ֑ם כִּ֚י שְׁנַ֣יִם יָלְדָ֔ה־לִּ֖י אִשְׁתִּֽי׃ 28 וַיֵּצֵ֤א
הָאֶחָד֙ מֵֽאִתִּ֔י וָאֹמַ֕ר אַ֖ךְ טָ֣רֹף טֹרָ֑ף וְלֹ֥א
רְאִיתִ֖יו עַד־הֵֽנָּה׃ 29 וּלְקַחְתֶּ֨ם גַּם־אֶת־זֶ֜ה
מֵעִ֣ם פָּנַ֗י וְקָרָ֤הוּ* אָסוֹן֙ וְהוֹרַדְתֶּ֣ם אֶת־
שֵׂיבָתִ֔י בְּרָעָ֖ה שְׁאֹלָֽה׃
30 וְעַתָּ֡ה כְּבֹאִי֩ אֶל־עַבְדְּךָ֨ אָבִ֜י וְהַנַּ֣עַר
אֵינֶ֣נּוּ אִתָּ֗נוּ וְנַפְשׁוֹ֙ קְשׁוּרָ֣ה בְנַפְשֹׁ֔ו׃
31 וְהָיָ֗ה כִּרְא֤וֹתוֹ כִּי־אֵין֙ הַנַּ֣עַר וָמֵ֔ת
וְהוֹרִ֙ידוּ֙ עֲבָדֶ֣יךָ אֶת־שֵׂיבַ֔ת עַבְדְּךָ֥ אָבִ֖ינוּ
בְּיָג֑וֹן שְׁאֹלָֽה׃ 32 כִּֽי־עַבְדְּךָ֞ עָרַ֣ב אֶת־הַנַּ֗עַר

v. 29. חסר א׳

RASHI **29 And he meets with disaster.** The Adversary levels his accusations at moments of danger. **You will send my white head down to Sheol in sorrow.** As long as he is with me, I find some comfort for the loss of his mother and his brother. If he dies, it will feel to me as if all three of them had died in a single day.

31 When he sees that the boy is not with us, he will die. He, the boy's father, will die of grief.

32 Now your servant has pledged himself for the boy. In case you are

KIMHI **30 Since his own life is so bound up with his.** His life—literally "his soul" (OJPS)—is so bound up with him, out of love, that if the boy does not return his soul will depart from him. We will be tremendously guilty, and so will you, for you would be responsible for causing his death. You say the boy sinned against you? But you told us, "Let me keep an eye on him" (v. 21). Is this your idea of keeping an eye on him? If he had not sinned, he would not need you to keep an eye on him. But if he did sin, as you claim—for he did not take the goblet, though since it was found in his bag we cannot deny it—then forgiving him would be "keeping an eye" on him.

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why did Jacob not just mention that Joseph "was torn by a beast" (v. 28) but emphasize that he "said" this? ✦ Why does Judah begin, "If I come to your servant my father and the boy is not with us" (v. 30), but not state the "then" clause right away? ✦ How can we reconcile "your servants" (plural, in v. 31) with "your servant" (singular, in v. 32)?

IBN EZRA **28 Alas, he was torn by a beast!** The proof of which is: **I have not seen him since.**

NAHMANIDES **24 When we came back to your servant my father, we reported my lord's words to him.** They told him immediately that they could not see the man again without their younger brother. But he did not want to let him go. He was perfectly willing to let Simeon stay in jail.

25 Later our father said, "Go back and procure some food for us." He would not let Benjamin come with us no matter what we said—until he was forced to do so by the famine.

27 As you know, my wife bore me two sons. You might think, "Who cares whether he is the only son of his mother? Why would that send Jacob's white head down to Sheol in sorrow? Jacob himself has plenty of other sons and even grandchildren. The mother is dead, so she would not be crying over him in front of Jacob." But Jacob only married one woman of his own volition, "my wife," Rachel. "The only woman I wanted to marry bore me no more than two sons. And I gave them all my love, as if they were my only two sons, and treated the rest as if they were all the sons of concubines. Now one of the two is dead, and the other is the only son I have left whom I love." That is why the text put Rachel first: "Jacob had Rachel and Leah called to the field" (31:4)—she came first in Jacob's thoughts. (See also "like Rachel and Leah, both of whom built up the House of Israel," of Ruth 4:11.) The commentators make the same point about 46:19 calling Rachel "Jacob's wife"; she is the only one who can honestly be called that. (In my opinion, however, that is because she is listed there between the maidservants; see my comment to 31:33.)

29 And he meets with disaster. If he meets with disaster as his brother did. Or perhaps Jacob meant that he might meet with disaster because of his youth and inexperience, as he seems to mean in 42:4. The Hebrew word implies not just "disaster" but accidental death, whether at human hands, by a wild animal, or simply from the change of climate.

32 Now your servant has pledged himself for the boy. He said that he would go "down to Sheol in grief" over him (v. 31). For, despite everything we said, he would not agree to let the boy go with us until I made myself the guarantee for him. He trusted me. — If

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **28 Alas, he was torn by a beast!** The infinitive absolute emphasizing "torn" occurs also only in 37:33 and Exod. 22:12 (Masorah).

32 Now your servant has pledged himself for the boy. If you need a slave, take me. For if you keep him I cannot go back anyway. Better that you keep me and let him go—I would have to flee somewhere I am not known. And why do you want to cause my father's

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NJPS pledged himself for the boy to my father, saying, 'If I do not bring him back to you, I shall stand guilty before my father forever.' [33]Therefore, please let your servant remain as a slave to my lord instead of the boy, and let the boy go back with his brothers. [34]For how can I go back to my father unless the boy is with me? Let me not be witness to the woe that would overtake my father!"

45 Joseph could no longer control himself before all his attendants, and he cried out, "Have everyone withdraw from me!" So there was no one else about when Joseph made himself known to his

OJPS became surety for the lad unto my father, saying: If I bring him not unto thee, then shall I bear the blame to my father for ever. [33]Now therefore, let thy servant, I pray thee, abide instead of the lad a bondman to my lord; and let the lad go up with his brethren. [34]For how shall I go up to my father, if the lad be not with me? lest I look upon the evil that shall come on my father."

45 Then Joseph could not refrain himself before all them that stood by him; and he cried: "Cause every man to go out from me." And there stood no man with him, while Joseph made himself known

מֵעִם אָבִי לֵאמֹר אִם־לֹא אֲבִיאֶנּוּ אֵלֶיךָ וְחָטָאתִי לְאָבִי כָּל־הַיָּמִים׃ [33] וְעַתָּה יֵשֶׁב־נָא עַבְדְּךָ תַּחַת הַנַּעַר עֶבֶד לַאדֹנִי וְהַנַּעַר יַעַל עִם־אֶחָיו׃ [34] כִּי־אֵיךְ אֶעֱלֶה אֶל־אָבִי וְהַנַּעַר אֵינֶנּוּ אִתִּי פֶּן אֶרְאֶה בָּרָע אֲשֶׁר יִמְצָא אֶת־אָבִי׃

מה וְלֹא־יָכֹל יוֹסֵף לְהִתְאַפֵּק לְכֹל הַנִּצָּבִים עָלָיו וַיִּקְרָא הוֹצִיאוּ כָל־אִישׁ מֵעָלָי וְלֹא־עָמַד אִישׁ אִתּוֹ בְּהִתְוַדַּע יוֹסֵף

RASHI wondering why I am the one making a fuss and not my brothers, it is because they are all outsiders to this. But I connected myself to him very strongly—so strongly that I run the risk of banishment, both in this world and in the next.

33 Please let your servant remain as a slave to my lord instead of the boy. I am superior to him in every way: in physical strength, in military prowess, and in serving as an attendant.

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ How can Judah ask to "remain as a slave" (v. 33) when he has promised to "go back" (v. 34) with the boy? ✦ How can Judah use the weak argument of "Let me not be witness to the woe that would overtake my father" after the much stronger argument in v. 32 that he had "pledged himself"?
✦ Why could Joseph "no longer control himself before all his attendants" (v. 1)?

RASHBAM talking and offering to be your slave in his stead.

45:1 Joseph could no longer control himself. It had taken the greatest effort he could muster to control himself this long (see 43:31). **Before all his attendants.** In front of them. **He cried out.** To his assistants. **Have everyone withdraw from me!** Get all my attendants out of the building. — All this is the straightforward sense of the text.

45:1 Joseph could no longer control himself before all his attendants. He could not bear the thought of having Egyptians standing around listening to his brothers' embarrassment when he made himself known to them.

IBN EZRA **45:1 Joseph could no longer control himself.** He could bear it no longer. **Before all his attendants.** Not "before"; the Hebrew says that he could not wait "*for* all his attendants" to leave, so he had to call for them to be removed.

KIMHI **45:1 Joseph could no longer control himself before all his attendants, and he cried out.** He was so overcome with hearing so many times of the distress his father would be in that he could no longer keep himself from crying. So on account of his attendants, he cried out, **Have everyone withdraw from me!** More precisely, "Clear everyone out!" The servants whom he ordered to do this left with the rest. He said "everyone" and he meant "everyone."

NAHMANIDES "your servants will send the white head of your servant our father down to Sheol in grief" (v. 31) is to be taken at face value, **[F]** Judah is saying, "We would be causing our elderly father to die of grief—for I guaranteed we would bring the boy back."

34 How can I go back to my father? Judah is saying he would prefer to be a slave for life rather than go back to his father without the boy. He could not stand to see his father's grief. He would weep and complain bitterly about the boy all day long. He is explaining this because he does not want Joseph to suspect he is making the offer only because he thinks it would easier for him to escape than for Benjamin.

45:1 Joseph could no longer control himself. See the comments of Rashi and Ibn Ezra, but also the translation of Onkelos and the way this verb is used in "*I forced myself* to present the burnt offering" (1 Sam. 13:12). What I think is that there were many people from Pharaoh's palace and other Egyptians present, all feeling sorry for Benjamin and begging Joseph to give in to Judah's plea. Joseph could not hold out against them any longer and angrily told his servants to get rid of them: "I am speaking with these people!" Once they left and he began to weep, all the people who had been forced to withdraw heard him, for they were still in the outer courtyard. **Before all his attendants.** Literally, those "that stood by him" (OJPS), but this seems to be an expression for a servant who "stands" ready to do what he is called on to do: "Solomon's 3,300 *officials* who were in charge of the work" (1 Kings 5:30); "the divine beings *presented* themselves before the LORD" (Job 1:6); "the servant *in charge of* the reapers" (Ruth 2:6). **He cried out.** Out loud, angrily. **Have everyone withdraw from me!** Except for these men. — He did not want them to hear when he reminded his brothers about how they had sold him, which would make trouble for them and for him too. Pharaoh's servants and the other Egyptians would say, "These treacherous men must not stay in our country nor 'tread upon our fortresses' [Mic. 5:4]. They betrayed their brother and their father too. What will they do to our king and our people?!" They would not believe in Joseph any longer, either.

[F] See Nahmanides' comment to v. 19.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS death? He certainly has committed no crime (Bekhor Shor). My father will die as soon as he sees me without Benjamin. Knowing that I pledged myself, he will be certain that Benjamin is dead, since only that could keep me from fulfilling my pledge (Sforno).

33 Please let your servant remain as a slave to my lord instead of the boy. By enslaving himself, Judah would pay completely for the crime of enslaving Joseph (Abarbanel).

45:1 Joseph could no longer control himself. He could no longer "restrain himself" (compare OJPS) from crying or revealing himself to them. He had no answer for Judah and realized that his father was genuinely in distress (Bekhor Shor). **Before all his attendants.** Joseph could no longer restrain his tears; and because of all the attendants crowding around him, front and back, he could not make his

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NJPS brothers. [2]His sobs were so loud that the Egyptians could hear, and so the news reached Pharaoh's palace.

[3]Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph. Is my father still well?" But his brothers could not answer him, so dumfounded were they on account of him.

[4]Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Come forward to me." And when they came forward, he said, "I am your brother Joseph, he whom you sold into Egypt. [5]Now, do not be distressed or reproach yourselves because you sold me hither; it was to save life that God sent me ahead of you. [6]It is now two years that there has been famine in the land, and there are still five years to come in which there shall be no yield from tilling. [7]God has sent me ahead of you to ensure your survival on earth, and to save your lives in an extraordinary deliverance.

אֶל־אֶחָיו׃ 2 וַיִּתֵּן אֶת־קֹלוֹ בִּבְכִי וַיִּשְׁמְעוּ
מִצְרַיִם וַיִּשְׁמַע בֵּית פַּרְעֹה׃
3 וַיֹּאמֶר יוֹסֵף אֶל־אֶחָיו אֲנִי יוֹסֵף הַעוֹד
אָבִי חָי וְלֹא־יָכְלוּ אֶחָיו לַעֲנוֹת אֹתוֹ כִּי
נִבְהֲלוּ מִפָּנָיו׃
4 וַיֹּאמֶר יוֹסֵף אֶל־אֶחָיו גְּשׁוּ־נָא אֵלַי וַיִּגָּשׁוּ
וַיֹּאמֶר אֲנִי יוֹסֵף אֲחִיכֶם אֲשֶׁר־מְכַרְתֶּם
אֹתִי מִצְרָיְמָה׃ 5 וְעַתָּה | אַל־תֵּעָצְבוּ
וְאַל־יִחַר בְּעֵינֵיכֶם כִּי־מְכַרְתֶּם אֹתִי הֵנָּה
כִּי לְמִחְיָה שְׁלָחַנִי אֱלֹהִים לִפְנֵיכֶם׃ 6 כִּי־
זֶה שְׁנָתַיִם הָרָעָב בְּקֶרֶב הָאָרֶץ וְעוֹד חֲמֵשׁ
שָׁנִים אֲשֶׁר אֵין־חָרִישׁ וְקָצִיר׃ 7 וַיִּשְׁלָחֵנִי
אֱלֹהִים לִפְנֵיכֶם לָשׂוּם לָכֶם שְׁאֵרִית
בָּאָרֶץ וּלְהַחֲיוֹת לָכֶם לִפְלֵיטָה גְּדֹלָה׃

OJPS unto his brethren. [2]And he wept aloud; and the Egyptians heard, and the house of Pharaoh heard.

[3]And Joseph said unto his brethren: "I am Joseph; doth my father yet live?" And his brethren could not answer him; for they were affrighted at his presence.

[4]And Joseph said unto his brethren: "Come near to me, I pray you." And they came near. And he said: "I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt. [5]And now be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither; for God did send me before you to preserve life. [6]For these two years hath the famine been in the land; and there are yet five years, in which there shall be neither plowing nor harvest. [7]And God sent me before you to give you a remnant on the earth, and to save you alive for a great deliverance.

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why did Joseph ask, "Is my father still alive?" (v. 2; see OJPS), when they have made clear two or three times that he was? ✦ Why does he tell the brothers, "Come forward to me" (v. 4)? ✦ Why does he repeat, "I am your brother Joseph, he whom you sold into Egypt," and why add "your brother" and "he whom you sold into Egypt" to his original statement in v. 3? ✦ Why does he tell them, "Do not be distressed or reproach yourselves" (v. 5), rather than "Do not be ashamed"? ✦ Why does Joseph say, "God sent me ahead of you," twice, in v. 5 and again in v. 7? ✦ What is the difference between "to ensure your survival on earth" and "to save your lives in an extraordinary deliverance"?

RASHI **2 So the news reached Pharaoh's palace.** Rather, "the house of Pharaoh heard" (OJPS)—Pharaoh's servants and the other members of his household. It does not literally refer to a house. It is like saying "the House of Israel" or "the House of Judah."

3 So dumfounded were they on account of him. On account of their embarrassment.

4 Come forward to me. NJPS omits a crucial word in the Hebrew: "I pray you" (OJPS). He saw them shifting backward and realized, "My brothers are ashamed." So he spoke to them gently and comfortingly—and he showed them that he was circumcised.

5 It was to save life that God sent me ahead of you. To save *your* lives.

KIMHI **2 His sobs were so loud that the Egyptians could hear, and so the news reached Pharaoh's palace.** The Egyptians whom he had ordered out of the room heard him sobbing, and the news traveled from person to person until it reached the palace: "Joseph is crying!"

4 Come forward to me. He saw how frightened they were and encouraged them to come closer and not be afraid.

IBN EZRA **2 His sobs.** In Hebrew, this noun is at the end of the phrase; nevertheless, it does not take the expected pausal form. For a similar example, see "I am the man who has known affliction" (Lam. 3:1).

NAHMANIDES **6 It is now two years that there has been famine in the land.** He wanted to make sure they understood that by now the Egyptians had eaten everything they had, and the price of grain had risen steeply. **And there are still five years to come in which there shall be no yield from tilling.** Five years in which you would not have anything whatsoever to eat if the Holy One had not sent me here before you.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS way to a private room as he had in 43:30 (Abarbanel). He could no longer control himself well enough to deal with all the affairs his attendants were pressing on him (Sforno).

2 His sobs were so loud that the Egyptians could hear. They understood that these were respectable men and that Joseph, though ruler of Egypt, was tremendously pained by his separation from them. The story shows us Joseph's high rank and his great wisdom in all that he did. Otherwise it would be completely unnecessary for the Torah to tell us this story (Abarbanel).

3 Is my father still well? Literally, "Is my father still alive?" (compare OJPS). Joseph knew perfectly well that he was—they had just been talking about him—but was trying to get them to begin speaking again. He says "my father" rather than "our father" because he meant, "My father who so loves me—is he really still alive, or has he died at grief over losing Benjamin?" He intended to continue by asking them how their wives and children and livestock were, and what had been happening to them (Abarbanel). How could he not have died out of worry over me? (Sforno).

4 Come forward to me. He could not go forward to all of them at once; closer to this one would be farther from that one. But he wanted to say, "You sold me," quietly enough so that no one outside could hear (Bekhor Shor). So it was not a matter of him demanding that they pay him respect (Hizkuni). **I am your brother Joseph, he whom you sold into Egypt.** Which nobody but you and I could know. Even the people who bought me did not know that I was your brother (Sforno).

5 Now, do not be distressed or reproach yourselves. The precise Hebrew phrase for "do not reproach"—"and now be not . . . angry" in OJPS—occurs nowhere else but in Judah's request in 44:18, "do not be impatient" (Masorah). **It was to save life that God sent me ahead of you.** If you meant to eat pork and got lamb instead, well, as Prov. 12:21 says, "No harm befalls the righteous" (Bekhor Shor).

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NJPS [8]So, it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh, lord of all his household, and ruler over the whole land of Egypt.

[9]"Now, hurry back to my father and say to him: Thus says your son Joseph, 'God has made me lord of all Egypt; come down to me without delay. [10]You will dwell in the region of Goshen, where you will be near me—you and your children and your grandchildren, your flocks and herds, and all that is yours. [11]There I will provide for you—for there are yet five years of famine to come—that you and your household and all that is yours may not suffer want.' [12]You can see for yourselves, and my brother Benjamin for himself, that it is

OJPS [8]So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God; and He hath made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and ruler over all the land of Egypt.

[9]Hasten ye, and go up to my father, and say unto him: Thus saith thy son Joseph: God hath made me lord of all Egypt; come down unto me, tarry not. [10]And thou shalt dwell in the land of Goshen, and thou shalt be near unto me, thou, and thy children, and thy children's children, and thy flocks, and thy herds, and all that thou hast; [11]and there will I sustain thee; for there are yet five years of famine; lest thou come to poverty, thou, and thy household, and all that thou hast. [12]And, behold, your eyes see, and the eyes of my brother Benjamin, that it is my mouth that

8 וְעַתָּה לֹא־אַתֶּם שְׁלַחְתֶּם אֹתִי הֵנָּה כִּי ✦ הָאֱלֹהִים וַיְשִׂימֵנִי לְאָב לְפַרְעֹה וּלְאָדוֹן לְכָל־בֵּיתוֹ וּמֹשֵׁל בְּכָל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם׃
9 מַהֲרוּ וַעֲלוּ אֶל־אָבִי וַאֲמַרְתֶּם אֵלָיו כֹּה אָמַר בִּנְךָ יוֹסֵף שָׂמַנִי אֱלֹהִים לְאָדוֹן לְכָל־מִצְרָיִם רְדָה אֵלַי אַל־תַּעֲמֹד׃
10 וְיָשַׁבְתָּ בְּאֶרֶץ־גֹּשֶׁן וְהָיִיתָ קָרוֹב אֵלַי אַתָּה וּבָנֶיךָ וּבְנֵי בָנֶיךָ וְצֹאנְךָ וּבְקָרְךָ וְכָל־אֲשֶׁר־לָךְ׃ 11 וְכִלְכַּלְתִּי אֹתְךָ שָׁם כִּי־ עוֹד חָמֵשׁ שָׁנִים רָעָב פֶּן־תִּוָּרֵשׁ אַתָּה וּבֵיתְךָ וְכָל־אֲשֶׁר־לָךְ׃ 12 וְהִנֵּה עֵינֵיכֶם רֹאוֹת וְעֵינֵי אָחִי בִנְיָמִין כִּי־פִי הַמְדַבֵּר

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Doesn't "it was not you who sent me here" (v. 8) contradict "he whom you sold into Egypt" of v. 4? ✦ What is the point of his consoling them, when they after all—no matter what ended up happening—intended to do him harm? ✦ Why does Joseph state, "You can see for yourselves, and my brother Benjamin for himself" (v. 12)? Were Benjamin's "eyes" (see OJPS) any different than theirs? ✦ What does it prove that they are "seeing" Joseph's mouth (again, see OJPS)? ✦ What does any of this have to do with the promise Joseph made in v. 11 that "I will provide for you"?

RASHI **8 He has made me a father to Pharaoh.** A companion and protector.

9 Hurry back to my father. More precisely, "hurry *up* to my father." The land of Israel is higher than any other land.

11 That you and your household and all that is yours may not suffer want. That you may not become impoverished and go into debt. — For the Hebrew verb, compare "the LORD *makes poor* and makes rich" (1 Sam. 2:7).

12 You can see for yourselves. You can see my high station. And you can see that I am your brother, for I am circumcised like you. **And my brother Benjamin for himself.** Literally our verse says, "Your eyes see, and the eyes of my brother Benjamin"

RASHBAM **11 May not suffer want.** Rather, "may not be dispossessed"—driven from the land by the famine. For this use of the verb, see "that you may quickly *dispossess* and destroy them" (Deut. 9:3). Note that the ו of the verb replaces the י of the original root, as is standard; you can find another example (with a different root) in Deut. 7:25.

12 That it is indeed I who am speaking to you. No longer, as it had been up to now, through an interpreter. But in essence

IBN EZRA **8 So, it was not you who sent me here, but God.** Who sent me. **A father to Pharaoh.** That is, an instructor, like Jubal, who was the "*father* of all who play the lyre and the pipe" (4:21).

11 May not suffer want. That is, "may not be cut off"; compare "to *remove* from your path nations greater and more populous than you" (Deut. 4:38).

12 That it is indeed I who am speaking to you. In Hebrew, he says literally that "my mouth" is speaking. We have an interesting phenomenon here: *peh* becomes *pi* in

NAHMANIDES **10 You will dwell in the region of Goshen.** Joseph knew that his father would not want to stay in the heartland of Egypt, where the royal capital was. So he immediately sent along the message that he would settle them in Goshen. **You and your children.** "Come down to me without delay" (v. 9), you and your children **and your grandchildren, your flocks and herds, and all that is yours.**

11 That you and your household and all that is yours may not suffer want. He is treating his father respectfully. He told his brothers flat out that "it was to save life that God sent me ahead of you" (v. 5), "to save your lives in an extraordinary deliverance" (v. 7)—you would die if it were not for me. But he did not wish to speak this way to his father, to whom he said merely, "If you stay too long in Canaan, you will suffer want. I cannot send very much grain from the royal storehouses to Canaan for you—they will suspect me of stockpiling silver there so I can return home. But if you come down here they will realize you are my father and brothers and the king will give me permission to supply you."

12 That it is indeed I who am speaking to you. Literally, "that it is my mouth that is speaking to you" (compare OJPS)—that is, the commentators explain, "I am speaking to you in the holy tongue." Onkelos says the same. I suppose he might have said this to make nice to them, but it would not prove anything. It is hardly likely that only a single person in Egypt could speak Hebrew, which in my opinion was the language of Canaan. Abraham certainly did not bring it from Ur and Haran, where Aramaic was spoken (see 31:47). Nor was it some personal language. It was the language of Canaan, and Canaan was so close that many Egyptians must have known Hebrew. Certainly the ruler would know Hebrew, since it is customary for kings and rulers to know languages. See Daniel 2, where Nebuchadnezzar tells the Chaldeans in Hebrew, "I have had a dream and I am full of anxiety to know what I have dreamed," and they reply in Aramaic, "O king, live forever!" (Dan. 2:3–4). And of course when Joseph came down to Egypt from Canaan many others must have come at the same time. The brothers had much more reason to recognize him back when he told them, "I am your brother Joseph, he whom you sold into Egypt" (v. 4). What he is saying here is, "You can see that I am the ruler, the lord of all Egypt. It is my mouth telling you that you are my brothers and that I am instructing you to bring my father down here so I can support him. **[G]** So tell my father about my high

[G] Some texts of this comment have Joseph saying that the brothers can see he is saying all this to "them" (the Egyptians).

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **8 So, it was not you who sent me here, but God.** Since you see that it was God's plan, you see also that the preliminary causes that led to your selling me were also part of God's plan to make this happen (Sforno).

9 Come down to me without delay. Using the long form רדה rather the short form רד, but with a numerical value one less than רדו of 42:2, since by now one year of the 210 years had passed (Hizkuni).

12 You can see for yourselves, and my brother Benjamin for himself. Even Benjamin, who was not involved in selling me and thought I was dead (Bekhor Shor). If you yourselves do not want to tell him that I am alive, having invoked a curse on any of those

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NJPS indeed I who am speaking to you. 13And you must tell my father everything about my high station in Egypt and all that you have seen; and bring my father here with all speed."

14With that he embraced his brother Benjamin around the neck and wept, and Benjamin wept on his neck. 15He kissed all his brothers and wept upon them; only then were his brothers able to talk to him.

16The news reached Pharaoh's palace: "Joseph's brothers have come." Pharaoh and his courtiers were pleased. 17And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Say to your brothers, 'Do as follows: load up your beasts and go

OJPS speaketh unto you. 13And ye shall tell my father of all my glory in Egypt, and of all that ye have seen; and ye shall hasten and bring down my father hither."

14And he fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck, and wept; and Benjamin wept upon his neck. 15And he kissed all his brethren, and wept upon them; and after that his brethren talked with him.

16And the report thereof was heard in Pharaoh's house, saying: "Joseph's brethren are come"; and it pleased Pharaoh well, and his servants. 17And Pharaoh said unto Joseph: "Say unto thy brethren: This do ye: lade your beasts, and go, get you

אֲלֵיכֶם׃ 13 וְהִגַּדְתֶּם לְאָבִי אֶת־כָּל־כְּבוֹדִי בְּמִצְרַיִם וְאֵת כָּל־אֲשֶׁר רְאִיתֶם וּמִהַרְתֶּם וְהוֹרַדְתֶּם אֶת־אָבִי הֵנָּה׃
14 וַיִּפֹּל עַל־צַוְּארֵי בִנְיָמִן־אָחִיו וַיֵּבְךְּ וּבִנְיָמִן בָּכָה עַל־צַוָּארָיו׃ 15 וַיְנַשֵּׁק לְכָל־אֶחָיו וַיֵּבְךְּ עֲלֵהֶם וְאַחֲרֵי כֵן דִּבְּרוּ אֶחָיו אִתּוֹ׃
16 וְהַקֹּל נִשְׁמַע בֵּית פַּרְעֹה לֵאמֹר בָּאוּ אֲחֵי יוֹסֵף וַיִּיטַב בְּעֵינֵי פַרְעֹה וּבְעֵינֵי עֲבָדָיו׃ 17 וַיֹּאמֶר פַּרְעֹה אֶל־יוֹסֵף אֱמֹר אֶל־אַחֶיךָ זֹאת עֲשׂוּ טַעֲנוּ אֶת־בְּעִירְכֶם

RASHI (OJPS). He is lumping them together in order to say, "Just as there is no hatred in my heart for my brother Benjamin, who was not involved in my sale, neither is there any hatred in my heart toward you." **That it is indeed I who am speaking to you.** I am speaking to you in the holy tongue.

14 He embraced his brother Benjamin around the neck and wept. He wept for the two Temples that would one day be built, and subsequently destroyed, in the territory of Benjamin. **And Benjamin wept on his neck.** For the Tabernacle at Shiloh, which would be in the territory of Joseph, and which would also be destroyed.

15 He kissed all his brothers. The Piel verb used here implies multiple kisses. When the verb occurs in Qal, it implies just a single kiss. **[A] Only then.** When they saw that he was crying, and that he meant it wholeheartedly. **Were his brothers able to talk to him.** At first they had been too embarrassed.

16 The news reached Pharaoh's palace. With a passive verb, unlike the active verb of v. 2. The news "was heard" (OJPS) in Pharaoh's house—the actual palace building.

17 Load up your beasts. With grain.

[A] See Special Topics, "Biblical Hebrew."

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why is it that when Joseph embraced his brother Benjamin, "Benjamin wept on his neck" (v. 14), but when "he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them" (v. 15), they did not do so in return?

RASHBAM he is saying this: You will be able to tell my father that you did not hear this news secondhand. You see me with your own eyes and recognize that it is I, your brother Joseph, who is speaking to you. Therefore . . .

13 You must tell my father everything about my high station in Egypt and all that you have seen. He need not worry about coming down here; I have full power to take care of him.

IBN EZRA the construct state, as in "*the mouth of* the wicked" (e.g., Prov. 10:6). But the י of the first-person singular possessive displaces the י of the construct, so "my mouth" is also *pi*. They are indistinguishable. (He means that he is speaking their own language with them and not using an interpreter.)

14 Around the neck. The Hebrew word can be used in the singular or (as here) in the plural form with no difference in meaning. You will even find it with a *nun* ending. So the א does not disappear. **[B]**

17 Load up. Isa. 14:19, where NJPS translates the same word as "gashed" (by a sword), is actually close to our phrase in

[B] These last two statements are puzzling. The word is found with *nun* in Song 4:9, but that means "necklace" and has no א.

KIMHI **14 With that he embraced his brother Benjamin around the neck and wept, and Benjamin wept on his neck.** More emotionally than with the rest, since they were full brothers.

15 Only then were his brothers able to talk to him. They asked him all about what had happened to him since they had parted, and how he had risen to greatness.

16 Pharaoh and his courtiers were pleased. That Joseph turned out to be from a respectable family. For the family of Abraham was well known.

17 Load up your beasts. "Load" seems correct; see the contrast between loaded and

NAHMANIDES station" and so forth. "You can tell him that everything you have seen is true—I have the power to rescue him and preserve his life during the famine." Compare what the Holy One says to Ezekiel: "I have spoken" (e.g., Ezek. 23:34). And see B. Meg. 16b, where our phrase is understood to mean, "as is my mouth, so is my heart."

16 Joseph's brothers have come. Joseph had told Pharaoh's courtiers that he had brothers who were highly regarded in the land of the Hebrews, from which he had been stolen. Now they heard that the brothers he had spoken of had arrived. **Pharaoh and his courtiers were pleased.** They had considered it disgraceful that they were ruled by a foreign slave who "emerged from a dungeon to become king" (Eccles. 4:14). Now that his respectable brothers had come down and they realized that he indeed was fit to "attend upon kings" (Prov. 22:29), they were greatly relieved.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS present who would reveal it, Benjamin, who did not take that oath, can do so (Hizkuni). **It is indeed I who am speaking to you.** I do not need to ask anyone's permission to do whatever I want. — The proof cannot possibly be that he is speaking their language; all Hebrews spoke it. The interpreter spoke to them in Hebrew and it never occurred to them that *he* might be Joseph (Gersonides). Since he himself was speaking to them, he did not want to speak at length about how powerful and important he was. As Prov. 27:2 tells us, "Let the mouth of another praise you, not your own" (Abarbanel).

14 With that he embraced his brother Benjamin around the neck. "Neck" has a plural form here; he embraced him on both sides of the neck (Hizkuni).

15 He kissed all his brothers and wept upon them. But they did not weep over him, being too ashamed of the evil they had done (Abarbanel).

16 Pharaoh and his courtiers were pleased. He had told them that he had been "kidnapped from the land of the Hebrews" (40:15), but he had said nothing about his brothers selling him (Abarbanel).

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NJPS at once to the land of Canaan. [18]Take your father and your households and come to me; I will give you the best of the land of Egypt and you shall live off the fat of the land.' [19]And you are bidden [to add], 'Do as follows: take from the land of Egypt wagons for your children and your wives, and bring your father here. [20]And never mind your belongings, for the best of all the land of Egypt shall be yours.'"

[21]The sons of Israel did so; Joseph gave them wagons as Pharaoh had commanded, and he supplied them with provisions for the journey. [22]To each of them, moreover, he gave a change of clothing; but to Benjamin he gave three hundred pieces of

וּלְכוּ־בֹ֖אוּ אַ֥רְצָה כְּנָֽעַן׃ 18 וְקַחְוּ֙ אֶת־ אֲבִיכֶ֣ם וְאֶת־בָּתֵּיכֶ֔ם וּבֹ֖אוּ אֵלָ֑י וְאֶתְּנָ֣ה לָכֶ֗ם אֶת־טוּב֙ אֶ֣רֶץ מִצְרַ֔יִם וְאִכְל֖וּ אֶת־ חֵ֥לֶב הָאָֽרֶץ׃ 19 וְאַתָּ֣ה צֻוִּ֔יתָה זֹ֣את עֲשׂ֔וּ ✦ קְח֥וּ לָכֶ֛ם מֵאֶ֥רֶץ מִצְרַ֖יִם עֲגָל֣וֹת לְטַפְּכֶ֑ם וְלִנְשֵׁיכֶ֗ם וּנְשָׂאתֶם֙ אֶת־אֲבִיכֶ֔ם וּבָאתֶֽם׃ 20 וְעֵינְכֶ֣ם אַל־תָּח֔וֹס עַל־כְּלֵיכֶ֖ם כִּי־ט֣וּב כָּל־אֶ֑רֶץ מִצְרַ֥יִם לָכֶ֖ם הֽוּא׃ 21 וַיַּֽעֲשׂ֣וּ־כֵ֔ן בְּנֵ֥י יִשְׂרָאֵ֖ל וַיִּתֵּ֣ן לָהֶ֣ם יוֹסֵ֗ף עֲגָל֥וֹת עַל־פִּ֖י פַּרְעֹ֑ה וַיִּתֵּ֥ן לָהֶ֖ם צֵדָ֥ה לַדָּֽרֶךְ׃ 22 לְכֻלָּ֣ם נָתַ֔ן לָאִ֖ישׁ חֲלִפ֣וֹת שְׂמָלֹ֑ת וּלְבִנְיָמִ֗ן נָתַ֙ן שְׁלֹ֣שׁ מֵא֔וֹת כֶּ֖סֶף

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why is there such emphasis on the wagons being provided "as Pharaoh had commanded" (v. 21, and see also v. 19)?

OJPS unto the land of Canaan; [18]and take your father and your households, and come unto me; and I will give you the good of the land of Egypt, and ye shall eat the fat of the land. [19]Now thou art commanded, this do ye: take you wagons out of the land of Egypt for your little ones, and for your wives, and bring your father, and come. [20]Also regard not your stuff; for the good things of all the land of Egypt are yours."

[21]And the sons of Israel did so; and Joseph gave them wagons, according to the commandment of Pharaoh, and gave them provision for the way. [22]To all of them he gave each man changes of raiment; but to Benjamin he gave three hundred shekels

RASHI **18 The best of the land of Egypt.** The best land in Egypt is the land of Goshen. But Pharaoh was prophesying without knowing it. They would take all the best of Egypt **[B]** and leave it as barren as the bottom of the ocean. **The fat of the land.** "Fat" in this sense always means "the best." Compare "the *good* of the land of Egypt" (OJPS).

19 And you are bidden [to add]. See OJPS; NJPS has understood the sense correctly. **Do as follows.** Tell them they are to do all this under my authority.

[B] See Exod. 12:35–36.

RASHBAM **19 And you are bidden [to add].** Literally, "you have been commanded," that is, I am commanding you right now. **Take from the land of Egypt wagons.** And the animals to pull them. For no one was permitted to take wagons out of the kingdom without Pharaoh's permission. As we read in M. Bek. 4:4, not a cow or a sow leaves Egypt without its womb being removed. **[A]**

[A] Some think Rashbam means it was forbidden to take "calves" out of Egypt (see the Additional Comments to v. 27).

KIMHI unloaded camels on B. Sanh. 32b. But my grandfather of blessed memory explained it not as "load" but "goad." Pharaoh was telling them to goad their beasts to make them go faster. Saadia translated it the same way.

19 And you are bidden [to add], "Do as follows: take from the land of Egypt wagons for your children and your wives." Since "you are commanded" (compare OJPS) not to remove anything from me, you must tell your brothers to do it. — My grandfather explains it this way: Joseph had commanded that no grain be removed from Egypt in wagons, to keep the grain supply from getting too low. Pharaoh told him, "Nonetheless, even though *you* are commanded not to do so, tell your brothers that they may take wagons and load them full of grain. When they come back, they can use them to bring their children and their wives."

IBN EZRA meaning. **[C] Your beasts.** Your animals: "Why have you brought the LORD's congregation into this wilderness for us and our *beasts* to die there?" (Num. 20:4).

18 The fat of the land. The "fat" is correct.

22 Several changes of clothing. Implying a minimum of two. Being "changes," none of them were like any of the others.

[C] The corpse there is "loaded" with wounds. But see Kimhi's comment.

20 And never mind your belongings. Literally, "let your eyes not take pity" on them. Hebrew connects pity to the eye even though it is really a function of the heart, because it is what the eye sees that fills the heart with pity.

21 The sons of Israel did so. Loading the wagons and preparing to leave in a hurry. **Joseph gave them wagons as Pharaoh had commanded.** This argues for what my grandfather wrote. Joseph could not have given them these wagons without Pharaoh's authorization.

NAHMANIDES **19 And you are bidden [to add], "Do as follows."** Joseph actually had to be "commanded" (OJPS) to do this. Pharaoh knew that Joseph was very disciplined and would in fact not touch the king's money; he left everything in Joseph's hands and "paid attention to nothing" (39:6). So Pharaoh thought Joseph might actually not want to send anything to his father. So he told him, "I am commanding you to do so in any event."

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **19 Do as follows: take from the land of Egypt wagons for your children and your wives.** The reason for not taking wagons out of Egypt without permission is that they were drawn by horses. They were used only for the wives of the kings and their children, or for officials' wives. Egypt was a center of horse raising, and they wanted to make sure to maintain the distinction between the nobles and the lower classes (Gersonides). In those days wagons were used exclusively for military purposes, as we see from Ps. 46:10, "He puts a stop to wars throughout the earth, breaking the bow, snapping the spear, consigning *wagons* to the flames" (Abarbanel). Do all this to make sure your father does not refuse to come. When he sees everything in complete readiness, he will not be able to delay. — And in fact vv. 27–28 will prove this correct (Sforno).

22 To each of them, moreover, he gave a change of clothing. He wanted his brothers to look respectable (Abarbanel). **Three hundred pieces of silver.** Thus as it were fining each of the 10 brothers who actually sold him 300 pieces of silver, which is 10 times the price of a slave according to Exod. 21:32 (Hizkuni). **Several changes of clothing.** Literally "five" (OJPS), as in 43:34, when "Benjamin's portion was five times that of anyone else" (Bekhor Shor). Shirts and pants, which people do change frequently. But some say he gave them clothing because he was responsible for their tearing their clothing in 44:13. It is possible to account for the literal "five" this way: one to replace the garment that he too tore; one because Benjamin was his full brother; a third to repay him for the embarrassment he

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NJPS silver and several changes of clothing. 23And to his father he sent the following: ten he-asses laden with the best things of Egypt, and ten she-asses laden with grain, bread, and provisions for his father on the journey. 24As he sent his brothers off on their way, he told them, "Do not be quarrelsome on the way."

25They went up from Egypt and came

וְחָמֵשׁ חֲלִפֹּת שְׂמָלֹת׃ 23 וּלְאָבִיו שָׁלַח כְּזֹאת עֲשָׂרָה חֲמֹרִים נֹשְׂאִים מִטּוּב מִצְרַיִם וְעֶשֶׂר אֲתֹנֹת נֹשְׂאֹת בֶּר וָלֶחֶם וּמָזוֹן לְאָבִיו לַדָּרֶךְ׃ 24 וַיְשַׁלַּח אֶת־אֶחָיו וַיֵּלֵכוּ וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם אַל־תִּרְגְּזוּ בַּדָּרֶךְ׃ 25 וַיַּעֲלוּ מִמִּצְרַיִם וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶרֶץ* כְּנַעַן אֶל־

v. 25. סבירין ומטעין "ארצה"

OJPS of silver, and five changes of raiment. 23And to his father he sent in like manner ten asses laden with the good things of Egypt, and ten she-asses laden with corn and bread and victual for his father by the way. 24So he sent his brethren away, and they departed; and he said unto them: "See that ye fall not out by the way."

25And they went up out of Egypt, and

RASHI **23 He sent the following.** Literally, he sent "in accordance with this," in accordance with the following requisition list. **The best things of Egypt.** According to the Talmud, he sent him aged wine of the kind that elders enjoy. But according to the midrash, he sent him a supply of Egyptian *ful*. **Grain, bread, and provisions.** The "provisions" were delicacies to be enjoyed with the bread.

24 Do not be quarrelsome on the way. Do not engage in halakhic disputation, so that the trip does not agitate you. Another reading: Do not take big strides, and always get into town before the sun goes down. But the straightforward sense of the text is this. Since they had been embarrassed, he was worried that they might quarrel about having sold him. "It's your fault he was sold! You said nasty things about him and made us hate him!"

KIMHI **23 Grain.** This was the fodder for the asses. **Bread.** This was clean grain, for the people to eat. **Provisions.** The other kinds of human food—dates and other delicacies.

NAHMANIDES **23 And to his father he sent the following.** Rashi is wrong to think that "this" refers to the precise details of what follows. It simply means "this gift." The *k-* preposition, literally "like," does not mean "in accordance with" here; it is just idiomatic (see 39:17 and 19). Or perhaps it is saying that he sent his father provisions "like" the provisions he had supplied to his brothers—not to say that they were precisely equal, just that he was supplying provisions to his father "as" he had supplied to them—**grain, bread, and provisions for his father on the journey** down to Egypt. That is certainly correct. The he-asses and she-asses are mentioned to show that he sent not merely the loads but the means of transporting them. Joseph sent it all. The custom was to send both males and females, as indeed his father had done. **[H]**

24 Do not be quarrelsome on the way. The verb here describes excessive motion. But it is ordinarily associated with fear: "This day I begin to put the dread and fear of you upon the peoples everywhere under heaven, so that they shall *tremble* and quake because of you" (Deut. 2:25); "Yet even among those nations you shall find no peace . . . the LORD will give you there an *anguished* heart" (Deut. 28:65); "eat your bread in trembling and drink your water in *fear* and anxiety" (Ezek. 12:18); "I heard and my bowels *quaked*" (Hab. 3:16). So I think Joseph is telling them in our verse not to be afraid on the journey. Having been given "grain, bread, and provisions" and all "the best things of Egypt" (v. 23) during a time of such scarcity, they might be afraid of being attacked by bandits during the journey, all the more so on the return trip, when they would be burdened with everything they owned and could not hurry. So he told them to travel quickly and hurry back: "Hurry back to my father" (v. 9). He told them not to worry about a thing on the journey, for his name was attached to them—the name of the governor of all Egypt, in whose hands rested the lives of all those nations, and whom all would fear. They would be able to go and return in peace.

[H] See 32:15–16.

RASHBAM **23 He sent the following.** NJPS is correct. **Ten he-asses.** One for each of his 10 brothers. Even though Benjamin also went back with them, Joseph did not want to burden him. **[B]**

24 As he sent his brothers off. Accompanying them to see them off. That is the sense of the Piel verb used here; but sending someone with the expectation that he will go and return on his own is indicated by the use of the Qal. **[C] Do not be quarrelsome.** Rather, "do not be nervous." Have no fear whatsoever of bandits on the way. I have peace on every side. — For that use of the verb, see "an *anguished* heart" (Deut. 28:65); "Tremble, you carefree ones! *Quake*, O confident ones!" (Isa. 32:11); "*Shaken* are the pavilions of the land of Midian" (Hab. 3:7); "*tremble*, and sin no more" (Ps. 4:5); "Who *shakes* the earth from its place" (Job 9:6). In Aramaic the same verb means "to be angry," but in the language of the 24 books of the Bible it means "to tremble."

[B] The manuscript added a note from B. Mak. 11b proving that Benjamin did go back with them. It seems unlikely that Rashbam himself would require this proof. **[C]** See Special Topics, "Biblical Hebrew," and Rashbam's comment to 38:17.

IBN EZRA **23 The following.** Rather, "in like manner" (OJPS), and literally "like this" that he had given Benjamin: changes of clothing, the best that Egypt had to offer. **Grain.** The translations are correct. **Bread.** Again, this means just what it says. **And provisions.** Peas, beans, lentils, millet, spelt, figs, raisins, and dates—only these can be considered "provisions," not wheat and barley.

24 Do not be quarrelsome. On account of their sale of Joseph.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS caused him; and two more because he had framed Benjamin for thievery, making him liable for double repayment (Hizkuni). This way Benjamin would be able to change his clothes every day (Abarbanel).

23 And to his father he sent the following. Rather, "the like" (compare OJPS), 10 he-asses laden with the best clothing in Egypt (Bekhor Shor). **Ten he-asses laden with the best things of Egypt, and ten she-asses laden with grain, bread, and provisions for his father on the journey.** Thus each of the 10 brothers had two animals to lead. Benjamin also returned, but Joseph did not want to burden him (Hizkuni). The "provisions" were rice, legumes, and the like (Gersonides). "Issachar, Zebulun, *and* Benjamin" (Exod. 1:3), with the conjunction before the last of a list, demonstrates how our verse is to be read correctly: To his father he sent "in like manner" (OJPS, i.e., the same gift as to Benjamin), 10 he-asses *and* 10 she-asses (Sforno).

24 Do not be quarrelsome on the way. Rather, "be afraid of nothing on the way." If anyone tries to rob you, I will simply not sell him any grain, and he will die of starvation unless he returns everything he took. — "Quarrelsome" does not seem right; whoever was responsible for selling Joseph ended up being the one who did the most good (Bekhor Shor).

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NJPS to their father Jacob in the land of Canaan. 26And they told him, "Joseph is still alive; yes, he is ruler over the whole land of Egypt." His heart went numb, for he did not believe them. 27But when they recounted all that Joseph had said to them, and when he saw the wagons that Joseph had sent to transport him, the spirit of their father Jacob revived. 28"Enough!" said Israel. "My son Joseph is still alive! I must go and see him before I die."

OJPS came into the land of Canaan unto Jacob their father. 26And they told him, saying: "Joseph is yet alive, and he is ruler over all the land of Egypt." And his heart fainted, for he believed them not. 27And they told him all the words of Joseph, which he had said unto them; and when he saw the wagons which Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of Jacob their father revived. 28And Israel said: "It is enough; Joseph my son is yet alive; I will go and see him before I die."

יַעֲקֹב אֲבִיהֶם׃ 26 וַיַּגִּדוּ לוֹ לֵאמֹר עוֹד יוֹסֵף חַי וְכִי־הוּא מֹשֵׁל בְּכָל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם וַיָּפָג לִבּוֹ כִּי לֹא־הֶאֱמִין לָהֶם׃ 27 וַיְדַבְּרוּ אֵלָיו אֵת כָּל־דִּבְרֵי יוֹסֵף אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר אֲלֵהֶם וַיַּרְא אֶת־הָעֲגָלוֹת אֲשֶׁר־שָׁלַח יוֹסֵף לָשֵׂאת אֹתוֹ וַתְּחִי רוּחַ יַעֲקֹב אֲבִיהֶם׃ 28 וַיֹּאמֶר יִשְׂרָאֵל רַב עוֹד־יוֹסֵף בְּנִי חָי אֵלְכָה וְאֶרְאֶנּוּ בְּטֶרֶם אָמוּת׃ ✦ חמישי

RASHI **26 And they told him, "Joseph is still alive; yes, he is ruler over the whole land of Egypt."** More precisely, "they told him, 'Joseph is still alive,'" and [added] that he was ruler over the whole land of Egypt. **His heart went numb.** His heart "changed" away from believing them. That is, his mind could not turn toward their words. The root is found in Lam. 3:49 as well as in Mishnaic Hebrew and the Aramaic translations.

27 All that Joseph had said to them. He gave them a sign to give to his father—the passage he had been learning when he left, the passage where they "break the heifer's neck" (Deut. 21:3). **He saw the wagons that Joseph had sent.** These are not the "wagons" (*agalah*); those were sent by Pharaoh, not Joseph. He saw the *eglah*, the heifer—the sign Joseph sent him. **The spirit of their father Jacob revived.** The Shekhinah, which had departed from him, settled back upon him at last.

28 Enough! Rather, "So much!" I will now have so much more joy and happiness, since **my son Joseph is still alive.**

KIMHI **26 His heart went numb, for he did not believe them.** Apparently they had gotten there before the asses and the wagons, in order to bring their father the news.

27 The spirit of their father Jacob revived. The midrash that the Shekhinah returned to him (and with it the power of prophecy) would explain why he had no prophetic knowledge of Joseph all those years: he was grieving and mourning. When the spirit is occupied with worldly affairs, the Active Intellect cannot cleave to it. For it cannot cleave to anything that is not like it.

NAHMANIDES **26 His heart went numb.** Rashi's comment is not correct. This root refers to cessation: "Give yourself no *respite*" (Lam. 2:18); "My eyes shall flow without cease, without *respite*" (Lam. 3:49). Here too Jacob's heart and breath stopped—the beating of his heart ceased as it does when one is dead. This is a well-known reaction to sudden joy. It is described in the medical literature. People who are weak and elderly cannot stand a shock of this kind; many of them faint upon hearing good news. For the heart is suddenly opened wide, and its natural heat disperses to the extremities of the body. The heart itself ceases to beat, being suddenly chilled, and the elderly person falls down as if dead. **For he did not believe them.** He lay stock still for a greater part of the day. It is well known that the treatment for a person in this condition is to keep talking loudly to them and telling them the good news over and over until they can fully absorb it. That is what they are doing in v. 27—yelling Joseph's words into his ears and bringing the wagons in front of him. Finally his spirit returned to him, he began to breathe, and he came back to life: "the spirit of their father Jacob revived" (v. 27).

27 They recounted all that Joseph had said to them. It does not seem to me that Jacob was ever at any time in his life told that the brothers had sold Joseph. He thought that Joseph had gotten lost and that some people had seized him and sold him down to Egypt. The brothers certainly did not want to tell him, being afraid for their lives that he would get angry and curse them, as he indeed cursed Reuben, Simeon, and Levi. **[I]** Joseph was well-behaved enough not to want to tell him. Remember that the brothers tell Joseph, "Before his death your father left this instruction: So shall you say to Joseph, 'Forgive, I urge you, the offense and guilt of your brothers who treated you so harshly'" (50:16–17). If Jacob had known the truth, they would have begged him to say this to Joseph himself before he died. Joseph would certainly have forgiven them and not flouted his father's word. Then they would not have been in the dangerous situation they eventually did find themselves in, and they would not have had to make up this command. **The spirit of their father Jacob revived.** See my comment to "he did not believe them" (v. 26). Onkelos explains that the "spirit" of prophecy rested upon him, taking advantage of the word "spirit" to add this midrashic interpretation. It is certainly true; the text does not say that "Jacob revived" but made it a case of "an *inspired* man" (Num. 27:18)—"and now the Lord GOD has sent me, endowed with His *spirit*" (Isa. 48:16); "the *spirit* of the Lord GOD is upon me" (Isa. 61:1).

[I] See 49:4–7.

RASHBAM **26 He is ruler over the whole land of Egypt.** So do not be afraid to go down there. **His heart went numb.** Rather, "he reversed his heart" to say that it could not be true, for he did not believe them.

27 All that Joseph had said to them. The rest of the things he had said to them, which are described above: that he had wept on their necks and that they had recognized that he was indisputably their brother. **And when he saw the wagons that Joseph had sent.** As Pharaoh had commanded. **The spirit of their father Jacob revived.** For he had "kept the matter in mind" (37:11) that Joseph would eventually be a ruler. And of course the wagons could not have left Egypt without the ruler's permission; see my comment to v. 19.

28 Enough! I say "Enough!" to my disbelief. Most certainly **my son Joseph is still alive!** The "straightforward" explanations offered by others are far too tricky—in fact, they are nonsense.

IBN EZRA **26 His heart went numb.** The verb comes from the same root as "Give yourself no *respite*" (Lam. 2:18). His heart stopped. It is similar to what happened to Nabal when "his heart died within him" (1 Sam. 25:37). **For he did not believe them.** But when he saw the wagons his spirit revived. Jacob's heart did not literally stop, of course; this is how the prophets use language: "No breath is left in me" (Dan. 10:17).

28 Enough! Rather, "so much!" My joy at knowing that Joseph is alive is so great.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **27 When he saw the wagons.** The *agalot*, complete with *agalot* ("calves") to pull them, a visual pun. This was the sign that Joseph sent his father about what he had been learning when he disappeared (Hizkuni).

28 I must go and see him before I die. But I have no intention of staying there, as he suggested (Sforno).

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NJPS 46 So Israel set out with all that was his, and he came to Beer-sheba, where he offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac. 2God called to Israel in a vision by night: "Jacob! Jacob!" He answered, "Here." 3And He said, "I am God, the God of your father. Fear not to go down to Egypt, for I will

OJPS 46 And Israel took his journey with all that he had, and came to Beer-sheba, and offered sacrifices unto the God of his father Isaac. 2And God spoke unto Israel in the visions of the night, and said: "Jacob, Jacob." And he said: "Here am I." 3And He said: "I am God, the God of thy father; fear not to go down into Egypt; for I will there make of

מו וַיִּסַּע יִשְׂרָאֵל וְכָל־אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ וַיָּבֹא
בְּאֵרָה שָׁבַע וַיִּזְבַּח זְבָחִים לֵאלֹהֵי אָבִיו
יִצְחָק׃ 2 וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים | לְיִשְׂרָאֵל
בְּמַרְאֹת הַלָּיְלָה וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב | יַעֲקֹב
וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּנִי׃ 3 וַיֹּאמֶר אָנֹכִי הָאֵל אֱלֹהֵי
אָבִיךָ אַל־תִּירָא מֵרְדָה מִצְרַיְמָה כִּי־לְגוֹי

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why did the Holy One have to tell Jacob, "Fear not to go down to Egypt" (v. 3), when Jacob had just said, "My son Joseph is still alive! I must go and see him" (45:28), without any sign of fear, and he had already "set out" (v. 1) to do so?

RASHI **46:1 To the God of his father Isaac.** A man is more obligated to give honor to his father than to his grandfather. That is why it is "the God of Isaac" here and not "the God of Abraham."

2 Jacob! Jacob! Calling him twice, affectionately.

3 Fear not to go down to Egypt. He was distressed about being forced to go outside the land.

RASHBAM **46:1 The God of his father Isaac.** Isaac had made an altar in Beer-sheba when the Holy One appeared to him there (see 26:25). Now Israel "offered sacrifices" there as his father had done.

IBN EZRA **46:3 To go down.** The first root letter (י) is missing in this infinitive; the same occurs (with נ) in "You who have *covered* the heavens with Your splendor!" (Ps. 8:2), which is also an infinitive, of the same unusual form as ours, in the Hebrew.

KIMHI **46:1 He came to Beer-sheba, where he offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac.** Who had also intended to go down to Egypt because of famine; but God told him, "Do not go down to Egypt" (26:2). He offered these sacrifices in Beer-sheba because that is on the border of Canaan. Before he left the land, he wished to know God's will—whether He would prevent him from leaving as He had prevented his father, Isaac, or not. So he offered sacrifices in order that a spirit of prophecy would come upon him.

2 Jacob! Jacob! It had been a number of years since a spirit of prophecy had rested upon him. So He called him twice to help him understand that it was a spirit of prophecy that was calling him.

3 I am God, the God of your father. The one who prevented him from going to Egypt. **I will make you there into a great nation.** That is, I will make your sons into one.

NAHMANIDES **46:1 He offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac.** Rashi's comment just barely scratches the surface here. It should have said "the God of his fathers" without mentioning one to the exclusion of the other, as Jacob himself does in 32:10 and 48:16, or just that "he offered sacrifices to the Lord," as when Abraham "built an altar . . . to the LORD" (12:7,8 and 13:18). What need was there to say any more? But there is something more profound hidden in this verse, revealed to us by Genesis Rabbah. For when Jacob was about to go down to Egypt, he saw that the Exile would begin with him and his offspring, and he grew very afraid. So he offered sacrifices to the Fear of his father Isaac in order that the divine aspect of justice not target him. He did this in Beer-sheba because that was a house of prayer for his ancestors, where he had asked permission to leave the land and go to Haran. **[J]** And note that these are not burnt offerings (as presented by Abraham) but "sacrifices," that is, peace offerings. Jacob's intent was to establish peace between himself and all the different divine aspects, beginning first with the aspect of Might, which was the closest to him. **[K]** (That is what the expression from Genesis Rabbah cited by Rashi means; you are required to greet the student before you can approach the teacher.) I have seen the following in *Sefer ha-Bahir*: "Jacob had not yet been given his own strength; hence he had to take his oath through the strength given to his father." From all this we can learn why it does not say here that Jacob that "offered sacrifices to the Lord," and why Jacob is told in v. 3, "I am God, the God of your father." (See also 31:13.) Jacob had already been privileged to receive his portion: "You will keep faith with Jacob, loyalty to Abraham" (Mic. 7:20). That is why "the God of his father" appeared to him "in a vision by night" (v. 2)—that is, in attenuated form. That is the name, and that is the attribute. **[L]** He should not fear to go down to Egypt, for he would earn his judgment and be redeemed after the affliction (see v. 4). I will speak more about this in my comment to Exod. 20:16, with the help of the Holy One.

2 God called to Israel in a vision by night. **[M]** Those who are enlightened will understand why Onkelos translates as he does. The Aramaic translations of Onkelos and Jonathan both are understood by those graced by mystical learning. **Jacob! Jacob!** Having told him, "You shall be called Jacob no more, but Israel shall be your name" (35:10), one would expect the Holy One to address him by that exalted name, and indeed he is called Israel three times in this passage. **[N]** But He addresses him as Jacob here to hint that at this moment he cannot "strive with beings divine and human, and prevail" (32:29). Instead, he will be in "the house of bondage" (Exod. 13:3) until the Holy One brings him back. For the Exile begins as of now, with him. And see my comment to v. 8.

[J] See Nahmanides' comment to 28:17. **[K]** See Special Topics, "Nahmanides' Mysticism." **[L]** Nahmanides is being deliberately obscure. **[M]** We omit Nahmanides' extended argument with Maimonides, based largely on the interpretation of this phrase (see v. 4 and the note there). **[N]** In vv. 1, 2, and 5, assuming that "this passage" ends in v. 7. But see vv. 8, 29, and 30 as well as 45:28. Precisely which three Nahmanides means is not clear.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **46:1 He offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac.** His conscience was bothering him because the Holy One had told Isaac not to go down to Egypt, so he offered sacrifices to Him (Bekhor Shor). Isaac too had built an altar there; see 26:25 (Hizkuni).

3 I am God. The precise Hebrew phrase occurs only here and in "I am the God of Beth-el" of 31:13 (Masorah). **The God of your father.** Identifying Himself as the God to whom Jacob had offered sacrifice (Hizkuni). **Fear not to go down to Egypt.** You don't tell someone "fear not" unless they are afraid. Jacob thought, "Now that I am going down to Egypt, the time of enslavement and oppression that my grandfather was warned of must be near." The Holy One told him, "Fear not. If the time of enslavement and oppression is near, that means the time to fulfill the blessing I gave your grandfather, 'I will make of you a great nation' [12:2], is also near"—and indeed, the continuation says just that (Hizkuni). The Holy One will respond in turn to each of Jacob's fears (Abarbanel). **I will make you there into a great nation.** Jacob was afraid the Egyptians might kill him and his sons (Abarbanel). If your sons stay here, they will intermix with the Canaanites. But "the Egyptians could not dine with the Hebrews, since that would be abhorrent to the Egyptians" (43:32), so they will not mix there but will become a separate nation (Sforno).

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NJPS make you there into a great nation. 4I Myself will go down with you to Egypt, and I Myself will also bring you back; and Joseph's hand shall close your eyes."

5So Jacob set out from Beer-sheba. The sons of Israel put their father Jacob and their children and their wives in the wagons that Pharaoh had sent to transport him; 6and they took along their livestock and the wealth that they had amassed in the land of Canaan. Thus Jacob and all his offspring with him came to Egypt: 7he brought with him to Egypt his sons and grandsons, his daughters and granddaughters—all his offspring.

8These are the names of the Israelites, Jacob and his descendants, who came to Egypt.

OJPS thee a great nation. 4I will go down with thee into Egypt; and I will also surely bring thee up again; and Joseph shall put his hand upon thine eyes."

5And Jacob rose up from Beer-sheba; and the sons of Israel carried Jacob their father, and their little ones, and their wives, in the wagons which Pharaoh had sent to carry him. 6And they took their cattle, and their goods, which they had gotten in the land of Canaan, and came into Egypt, Jacob, and all his seed with him; 7his sons, and his sons' sons with him, his daughters, and his sons' daughters, and all his seed brought he with him into Egypt.

8And these are the names of the children of Israel, who came into Egypt, Jacob and his sons:

גָּדוֹל אֶשִׂימְךָ שָׁם׃ 4 אָנֹכִי אֵרֵד עִמְּךָ
מִצְרַיְמָה וְאָנֹכִי אֲעַלְךָ גַם־עָלֹה וְיוֹסֵף
יָשִׁית יָדוֹ עַל־עֵינֶיךָ׃
5 וַיָּקָם יַעֲקֹב מִבְּאֵר שָׁבַע וַיִּשְׂאוּ בְנֵי־
יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־יַעֲקֹב אֲבִיהֶם וְאֶת־טַפָּם
וְאֶת־נְשֵׁיהֶם בָּעֲגָלוֹת אֲשֶׁר־שָׁלַח פַּרְעֹה
לָשֵׂאת אֹתוֹ׃ 6 וַיִּקְחוּ אֶת־מִקְנֵיהֶם וְאֶת־
רְכוּשָׁם אֲשֶׁר רָכְשׁוּ בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן וַיָּבֹאוּ
מִצְרַיְמָה יַעֲקֹב וְכָל־זַרְעוֹ אִתּוֹ׃ 7 בָּנָיו
וּבְנֵי בָנָיו אִתּוֹ בְּנֹתָיו וּבְנוֹת בָּנָיו וְכָל־זַרְעוֹ
הֵבִיא אִתּוֹ מִצְרַיְמָה׃ ס
8 וְאֵלֶּה שְׁמוֹת בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל הַבָּאִים
מִצְרַיְמָה יַעֲקֹב וּבָנָיו

RASHI **4 I Myself will also bring you back.** He promised him he would be buried in the land.

6 The wealth that they had amassed in the land of Canaan. But he gave all the wealth he had amassed in Paddan-aram to Esau for his share in the cave of Machpelah. **[C]** He thought, "Possessions from outside the land are in any case not appropriate for me." That explains the unusual word Joseph quotes Jacob as saying in 50:5: "the grave which I *piled up* for myself in the land of Canaan." He heaped up piles of gold and silver and told Esau, "Take all these in exchange for the grave."

7 And granddaughters. Serah the daughter of Asher and Jochebed the daughter of Levi. **[D]**

8 Who came to Egypt. It does not actually say "who came," but "who were coming,"

[C] See Genesis 23. **[D]** See 46:17 and Exod. 6:20, respectively.

RASHBAM **4 I Myself will also bring you back.** For he is buried with his ancestors in the cave of Machpelah. **Joseph's hand shall close your eyes.** Rather, "shall handle your affairs." **[D]** Joseph will "put his hand on your affairs," that is, "handle your needs" as best he can. Compare "No arbiter is between us to *lay his hand* on us both" (Job 9:33), to handle things.

8 Jacob and his descendants. Jacob is counted among the "seventy persons" of v. 27; see my next comment.

[D] Rashbam reads *ayin* here as a variant of *inyan*; it is not clear why.

IBN EZRA **4 I Myself will also bring you back.** He would be buried in the land of Israel. **And Joseph's hand shall close your eyes.** When you die, as the living customarily do for the dead.

7 His daughters. Who consist solely of Dinah. But she may have had little maidservants who grew up with her, whom the text dignifies (because of her) with the name "Jacob's daughters" since they grew up in his household. This is how "the sons of Michal" acquired that name. **[D]** **And granddaughters.** The same logic applies, since he had only the one.

[D] See Ibn Ezra's second comment to 36:14.

KIMHI **4 I Myself will go down with you to Egypt.** No evil will happen to you on the way. **I Myself will also bring you back.** I will bring your descendants back to take possession of this land. **Joseph's hand shall close your eyes.** "Joseph flung himself upon his father's face and wept over him and kissed him" (50:1). The Holy One was promising him that Joseph would live after him, to take care of his sons and grandsons as long as he lived.

7 His daughters. Dinah and his daughters-in-law. **And granddaughters.** Serah and his grandsons' wives.

NAHMANIDES **4 I Myself will go down with you to Egypt.** **[O]** Onkelos's translation here is alluding to the rabbinic comment, based on this verse, that "the Shekhinah was exiled to Egypt along with them," and also that "the Shekhinah was exiled to Elam along with them," based on the verse, "I will set My throne in Elam, and wipe out from there king and officials—says the LORD" (Jer. 49:38). The saying (in v. 3) and the going down (in v. 4) have essentially the same reference. One who is enlightened will understand. May God show us further wonders from His Torah.

7 And granddaughters. Rashi explains why this is plural; let him explain why "daughters" is plural. **[P]** In fact, the text regularly uses plurals of this kind when listing genealogies, even when, as with "the sons of Dan" in v. 23 (see OJPS) there is only one to list. (See similarly Num. 26:8.) Here, too, "his daughters: Dinah; his granddaughters: Serah." Jochebed is hinted at here (according to tradition) but is not explicitly counted: "all these persons numbered 66" (v. 26).

8 These are the names of the Israelites, Jacob and his descendants, who came to Egypt. The sons will go down to Egypt under

[O] Nahmanides' comment to v. 1 includes a long essay (omitted here) explaining that Maimonides' understanding of Onkelos's attitude toward divine corporeality is mistaken. (For Maimonides' view, see *Guide* 1:27.) **[P]** Recent research has found that Rashi added a note to his commentary giving the same explanation that Nahmanides would later give.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **4 I Myself will go down with you to Egypt.** My providence will cling to you there (Gersonides). Jacob was afraid that Egypt was so full of idolatry that divine providence and prophecy would be unavailable to him there (Abarbanel). **I Myself will also bring you back.** Jacob was afraid that he would not be buried in the cave of Machpelah like his fathers (Abarbanel). **Joseph's hand shall close your eyes.** Jacob was afraid that Joseph would die before him and his joy would be turned once more into grief (Abarbanel). Rather, "Joseph shall put his hand over your eyes" (compare OJPS). You need not keep an eye on your property; Joseph will bring it down to you without your having to pay any attention to it, and you will not have to deal with the Egyptians, who are not worthy of coming close to you (Sforno).

5 The sons of Israel. In fact, this is the phrase, "the Children of Israel," that will be used from now on for the people, that is, "the Israelites" (Sforno).

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NJPS Jacob's first-born Reuben; [9]Reuben's sons: Enoch, Pallu, Hezron, and Carmi. [10]Simeon's sons: Jemuel, Jamin, Ohad, Jachin, Zohar, and Saul the son of a Canaanite woman. [11]Levi's sons: Gershon, Kohath, and Merari. [12]Judah's sons: Er, Onan, Shelah, Perez, and Zerah—but Er and Onan had died in the land of Canaan; and Perez's sons were Hezron and Hamul. [13]Issachar's sons: Tola, Puvah, Iob, and Shimron. [14]Zebulun's sons: Sered, Elon, and Jahleel. [15]Those were the sons whom Leah bore to Jacob in Paddan-aram, in addition to his daughter Dinah. Persons in all, male and female: 33.

בְּכֹר יַעֲקֹב רְאוּבֵן׃ 9 וּבְנֵי רְאוּבֵן חֲנוֹךְ
וּפַלּוּא וְחֶצְרוֹן וְכַרְמִי׃ 10 וּבְנֵי שִׁמְעוֹן
יְמוּאֵל וְיָמִין וְאֹהַד וְיָכִין וְצֹחַר וְשָׁאוּל
בֶּן־הַכְּנַעֲנִית׃ 11 וּבְנֵי לֵוִי גֵּרְשׁוֹן קְהָת
וּמְרָרִי׃ 12 וּבְנֵי יְהוּדָה עֵר וְאוֹנָן וְשֵׁלָה
וָפֶרֶץ וְזָרַח וַיָּמָת עֵר וְאוֹנָן בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן
וַיִּהְיוּ בְנֵי־פֶרֶץ חֶצְרוֹן וְחָמוּל׃ 13 וּבְנֵי
יִשָּׂשכָר תּוֹלָע וּפֻוָּה וְיוֹב וְשִׁמְרוֹן׃ 14 וּבְנֵי
זְבֻלוּן סֶרֶד וְאֵלוֹן וְיַחְלְאֵל׃ 15 אֵלֶּה ׀ בְּנֵי
לֵאָה אֲשֶׁר יָלְדָה לְיַעֲקֹב בְּפַדַּן אָרָם וְאֶת
דִּינָה בִתּוֹ כָּל־נֶפֶשׁ בָּנָיו וּבְנוֹתָיו שְׁלֹשִׁים
וְשָׁלֹשׁ׃

OJPS Reuben, Jacob's first-born. [9]And the sons of Reuben: Hanoch, and Pallu, and Hezron, and Carmi. [10]And the sons of Simeon: Jemuel, and Jamin, and Ohad, and Jachin, and Zohar, and Shaul the son of a Canaanitish woman. [11]And the sons of Levi: Gershon, Kohath, and Merari. [12]And the sons of Judah: Er, and Onan, and Shelah, and Perez, and Zerah; but Er and Onan died in the land of Canaan. And the sons of Perez were Hezron and Hamul. [13]And the sons of Issachar: Tola, and Puvah, and Iob, and Shimron. [14]And the sons of Zebulun: Sered, and Elon, and Jahleel. [15]These are the sons of Leah, whom she bore unto Jacob in Paddan-aram, with his daughter Dinah; all the souls of his sons and his daughters were thirty and three.

RASHI putting the reader into the moment of the story.

10 Saul the son of a Canaanite woman. Rather, "the son of *the* Canaanite woman"—Dinah, who conceived him by a Canaanite. When they killed Shechem, Dinah was not willing to leave with them until Simeon swore to her that he would marry her.

15 Those were the sons whom Leah bore to Jacob in Paddan-aram, in addition to his daughter Dinah. The males are called Leah's and the female is called

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ There are also some very serious questions about the numbers of Jacob's descendants. The text says "persons in all, male and female: 33" (v. 15), but if you count them, you will only come up with 32!

RASHBAM **15 Persons in all, male and female: 33.** They only add up to 33 if you count Jacob among them; see my previous comment. But our Sages say that the 33rd person is Jochebed, who was born "between the walls."

IBN EZRA **10 Saul the son of a Canaanite woman.** This proves that the sons of Jacob married Aramean, Egyptian, Edomite, and Midianite women. Simeon misbehaved by marrying a Canaanite woman, so the text must make special mention of it. That is why the deaths of Er and Onan are mentioned, too—they were the sons of a Canaanite woman. **[E]**

[E] See Genesis 38.

KIMHI **10 Saul the son of a Canaanite woman.** Apparently they all were prohibited by their grandfather Abraham from marrying Canaanite women. Simeon was too, but after he married his first wife and had children by her he married another wife, a Canaanite one, and had Saul by her. So the text is making that public. For the midrash, which reads the phrase as "a Canaanite's woman," see my comment to 34:26.

15 Persons in all, male and female: 33. See Ibn Ezra's comment to v. 27; he explains it as my grandfather did.

NAHMANIDES the name "children of *Israel*" (OJPS), for they will be fertile and prolific there, and their reputation and stature will grow. But he himself is "Jacob" now when he goes down there.

12 Er, Onan, Shelah, Perez, and Zerah. Er and Onan are mentioned among the Israelites "who came to Egypt" (v. 8) because of the mystery that can be understood by what we have already explained in our comment to 38:9. One who is enlightened will understand this, along with the meaning of the entire verse. They are also included in Num. 26:19 and 1 Chron. 2:3.

15 Persons in all, male and female: 33. When you count them you find only 32; according to tradition, based on Num. 26:59, the 33rd was Jochebed. **[Q]** As for Ibn Ezra's comment to v. 27, lest he be "clever in his own eyes" (Prov. 28:11) for confounding the words of our Sages, I must respond to him and say that there is indeed a great miracle involved in this matter of Jochebed, one of the hidden miracles that are the basis of the Torah. As Num. 26:59 points out, she is not merely a descendant of Levi but was literally the daughter of Levi himself. Exod. 6:20 tells us explicitly that "Amram took to wife his father's sister Jochebed." If we say that Levi had Jochebed in his youth, when he had his other children, and that she was born just a bit after he went down to Egypt, she would have to be extremely old when Moses was born—if not as old as the Sages say, at least something close to that. But if she was born quite a long time after Levi got to Egypt (say, 57 years), when he was 100 (for he was 43 when he went down to Egypt), **[R]** there would be *two* miracles involved. He would be as old as Abraham was when Isaac was born, and as Abraham himself asked, "Can a child be born to a man a hundred years old?" (17:17), and she would still have to be 73 when Moses was born. **[S]** We could move her birth to the very end of Levi's life, but then that would be a greater miracle than Abraham's.

But let me tell you something clear and true about the Torah. The miracles that are performed by a prophet who prophesies about them in advance, or by an angel who is demonstrably on a mission from God—these are the miracles that are mentioned in the text. Those that

[Q] See Rashi's comment. **[R]** When Joseph was 39. Per 41:46, Joseph was 30 when Pharaoh dreamed. The brothers came to Egypt nine years later, after seven years of plenty and two of famine. **[S]** According to tradition, the Israelites spent 210 years in Egypt; see Rashi's comment to 15:13. Moses was 80 when they left, so he was born after they had spent 130 years there. If Jochebed was born after Levi had spent 57 years in Egypt, she must have been 73 when Moses was born.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **11 Gershon, Kohath, and Merari.** Precise texts read "Gershon, *and* Kohath, and Merari" (Masorah).

12 Er and Onan had died in the land of Canaan. Then why are they mentioned? Judah was the cause of the family's going down to Egypt. Had he protested the sale of Joseph, the others would have submitted. The Holy One said, "You gave no thought to the pain this would cause your father. I swear, when your father rejoices again, I will remind you of the death of *your* two sons, to give *you* pain" (Hizkuni). **Perez's sons were Hezron and Hamul.** Perez cannot have been more than 43 at this time; for the implications, see my comment to 29:21 (Gersonides).

15 Those were the sons whom Leah bore to Jacob in Paddan-aram, in addition to his daughter Dinah. See Rashi's comment. The last to emit seed scatters the seed of the other, and of course males are born from male seed and females from female seed. Note that

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NJPS 16Gad's sons: Ziphion, Haggi, Shuni, Ezbon, Eri, Arodi, and Areli. 17Asher's sons: Imnah, Ishvah, Ishvi, and Beriah, and their sister Serah. Beriah's sons: Heber and Malchiel. 18These were the descendants of Zilpah, whom Laban had given to his daughter Leah. These she bore to Jacob—16 persons.

19The sons of Jacob's wife Rachel were Joseph and Benjamin. 20To Joseph were born in the land of Egypt Manasseh and Ephraim, whom Asenath daughter of Poti-phera priest of On bore to

16 וּבְנֵי גָד צְפִיוֹן וְחַגִּי שׁוּנִי וְאֶצְבֹּן עֵרִי
וַאֲרוֹדִי וְאַרְאֵלִי׃ 17 וּבְנֵי אָשֵׁר יִמְנָה וְיִשְׁוָה
וְיִשְׁוִי וּבְרִיעָה וְשֶׂרַח אֲחֹתָם וּבְנֵי בְרִיעָה
חֶבֶר וּמַלְכִּיאֵל׃ 18 אֵלֶּה בְּנֵי זִלְפָּה אֲשֶׁר־
נָתַן לָבָן לְלֵאָה בִתּוֹ וַתֵּלֶד אֶת־אֵלֶּה
לְיַעֲקֹב שֵׁשׁ עֶשְׂרֵה נָפֶשׁ׃
19 בְּנֵי רָחֵל אֵשֶׁת יַעֲקֹב יוֹסֵף וּבִנְיָמִן׃
20 וַיִּוָּלֶד לְיוֹסֵף בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם אֲשֶׁר יָלְדָה־
לוֹ אָסְנַת בַּת־פּוֹטִי פֶרַע כֹּהֵן אֹן אֶת־

OJPS 16And the sons of Gad: Ziphion, and Haggi, Shuni, and Ezbon, Eri, and Arodi, and Areli. 17And the sons of Asher: Imnah, and Ishvah, and Ishvi, and Beriah, and Serah their sister; and the sons of Beriah: Heber, and Malchiel. 18These are the sons of Zilpah, whom Laban gave to Leah his daughter, and these she bore unto Jacob, even sixteen souls.

19The sons of Rachel Jacob's wife: Joseph and Benjamin. 20And unto Joseph in the land of Egypt were born Manasseh and Ephraim, whom Asenath the daughter of Poti-phera priest of On bore unto

RASHI Jacob's, to teach you that when the woman emits seed first she gives birth to a male. When the man emits seed first, she gives birth to a female. **33.** When you count them up, though, you find only 32. The 33rd was Jochebed, who was born between the walls, just as they entered the capital of Egypt: "Jochebed daughter of Levi, who was born to Levi in Egypt" (Num. 26:59). She was born in Egypt but not conceived in Egypt.

19 The sons of Jacob's wife Rachel. The other three are not called "Jacob's wives" in this list. Rachel was the chief wife.

NAHMANIDES simply occur, whether in aid of the righteous or to extirpate the wicked, are not mentioned in the text, whether in the Torah or the Prophets. I thus "pour molten gold" into the mouth of my learned friend **[T]** for his supposed refutation of our Sages in his comment on "his descendants after him" (Num. 25:13) and in similar places too numerous to mention. But why should the Torah mention them? The entire basis of the Torah is *hidden* miracles. The whole point of the Torah is about miracles, not about science or culture. All the threats made in the Torah are signs and wonders. One does not naturally become "cut off" or die from sexual immorality or eating suet, nor do the heavens naturally turn to iron if we sow our crops in the sabbatical year. The same is true for the promises of success for the righteous as a result of their righteousness. All the prayers of King David, and our prayers too, are miracles and wonders. But none of them causes any obvious alteration in nature (as I have previously explained, and as I will explain further with God's help). **[U]** Let me present you with a reliable witness to what I have said. We know that from the time Israel entered the land until the birth of our lord David was approximately 370 years. **[V]** That period covered four generations, those of Salmon, Boaz, Obed, and Jesse. **[W]** That works out to 93 years per generation, meaning that each of them waited until he was almost as old as Abraham to have children, assuming that each did not father the next until the year of his death (for the life span did not reach a century in those days). If we suppose that even one of them had his first child at a reasonably young age, the other three would have had to be much *older* than Abraham. This would have been a much, much greater miracle than it was for Abraham, since by the time of David life spans were only about half as long as they were in Abraham's time. (We do have traditions that some of them lived extraordinarily long lives.) The miracle with Abraham, too, was not as the scholar to whom I am referring thinks (along with many other biblical scholars), for Abraham fathered Isaac 75 years before his death, when he had not yet lived even two-thirds of his life span. And old age does not begin until the first three of the four stages of life—childhood, youth, and maturity—have passed. Nowadays, when the average life span is 70, the physicians do not consider old age to begin until after 60. Abraham, of course, began having children again 40 years after the birth of Isaac, a miracle an order of magnitude greater than the original miracle. Let us suppose that the Holy One restored Abraham to his youthful vigor. Would this not pose a difficulty for my learned friend?—a great miracle, in obvious contradiction to nature, of which the text says precisely nothing. Even nowadays there are men who have children up to 70 or 80 or even later; women too are capable of bearing children as long they still have their periods, for which there seems to be no specific age limit. The miracle with Abraham and Sarah, as I explained, is that each of them was unable to have children when young, yet together, in advanced old age, they did produce a child. The additional miracle with Sarah was that she had already stopped having her period, at which point she should no longer have been able to bear a child.

Now. If Jochebed lived as long as her father and remained fertile until she was close to old age, it would not be unnatural for her to give birth at the age assigned to her by our Sages. Because God wished to redeem Israel through these two brothers, and the time for redemption had not yet arrived, He delayed their birth for a long time, until their mother was quite old. "Is anything too wondrous for the LORD?" (18:14).

19 The sons of Jacob's wife Rachel were Joseph and Benjamin. Ordinarily the text lists the sons of Leah and Rachel first and only then the sons of the maidservants, Zilpah and Bilhah (e.g., 35:23–26 and Exod. 1:2–4). Sometimes they are listed in birth order, "from the oldest in the order of his seniority to the youngest in the order of his youth" (43:33), as in 49:3–27. **[X]** But here, because the purpose was to identify the 70 who went down to Egypt, the more numerous are listed first. That is why Rachel is listed here, between the subsidiary wives. For that reason, it was necessary to add the extra mark of respect and call her "Jacob's wife" (see my comments to 31:33 and 44:27).

[T] Nahmanides is citing against Ibn Ezra a phrase used about Nebuchadnezzar on B. Sanh. 92b. **[U]** See his comments to 17:1, Exod. 6:3, and Lev. 26:11, among many others. **[V]** The Temple was built shortly after David's death, "in the four hundred and eightieth year after the Israelites left the land of Egypt" (1 Kings 6:1), and "David was thirty years old when he became king, and he reigned forty years" (2 Sam. 5:4). So David was born about 410 years after the exodus, 370 years after the Israelites entered the land. **[W]** See Ruth 4:20–22; Salmon's father Nahshon took part in the exodus (see Num. 1:7). **[X]** In fact, the order in 49:3–27 does not match that in 29:31–30:24. It is not clear how to make sense of Nahmanides' comment.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS the object marker *et*, which originally meant "with," appears nowhere in this list but here with Dinah. The twins born with each of Jacob's children did indeed die, except for the one born with Dinah, who makes up the count of 33 (Hizkuni). **Persons in all, male and female: 33.** Specifying that Jochebed "was born to Levi in Egypt" (Num. 26:59) is no proof that she was conceived elsewhere; v. 27 says the same about Joseph's sons (Gersonides).

20 Poti-phera. The name is also found only in 41:45 and 50 (Masorah).

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NJPS him. [21]Benjamin's sons: Bela, Becher, Ashbel, Gera, Naaman, Ehi, Rosh, Muppim, Huppim, and Ard. [22]These were the descendants of Rachel who were born to Jacob—14 persons in all.

[23]Dan's son: Hushim. [24]Naphtali's sons: Jahzeel, Guni, Jezer, and Shillem. [25]These were the descendants of Bilhah, whom Laban had given to his daughter Rachel. These she bore to Jacob—7 persons in all.

[26]All the persons belonging to Jacob who came to Egypt—his own issue, aside from the wives of Jacob's sons—all these persons numbered 66. [27]And Joseph's sons who were born to him in Egypt were two in number. Thus the total of Jacob's household who came to Egypt was seventy persons.

OJPS him. [21]And the sons of Benjamin: Bela, and Becher, and Ashbel, Gera, and Naaman, Ehi, and Rosh, Muppim, and Huppim, and Ard. [22]These are the sons of Rachel, who were born to Jacob; all the souls were fourteen.

[23]And the sons of Dan: Hushim. [24]And the sons of Naphtali: Jahzeel, and Guni, and Jezer, and Shillem. [25]These are the sons of Bilhah, whom Laban gave unto Rachel his daughter, and these she bore unto Jacob; all the souls were seven.

[26]All the souls belonging to Jacob that came into Egypt, that came out of his loins, besides Jacob's sons' wives, all the souls were threescore and six. [27]And the sons of Joseph, who were born to him in Egypt, were two souls; all the souls of the house of Jacob, that came into Egypt, were threescore and ten.

מְנַשֶּׁה וְאֶת־אֶפְרָיִם׃ 21 וּבְנֵי בִנְיָמִן בֶּלַע
וָבֶכֶר וְאַשְׁבֵּל גֵּרָא וְנַעֲמָן אֵחִי וָרֹאשׁ
מֻפִּים וְחֻפִּים וָאָרְדּ׃ 22 אֵלֶּה בְּנֵי רָחֵל
אֲשֶׁר יֻלַּד לְיַעֲקֹב כָּל־נֶפֶשׁ אַרְבָּעָה עָשָׂר׃
23 וּבְנֵי־דָן חֻשִׁים׃ 24 וּבְנֵי נַפְתָּלִי יַחְצְאֵל
וְגוּנִי וְיֵצֶר וְשַׁלֵּם׃ 25 אֵלֶּה בְּנֵי בִלְהָה
אֲשֶׁר־נָתַן לָבָן לְרָחֵל בִּתּוֹ וַתֵּלֶד אֶת־אֵלֶּה
לְיַעֲקֹב כָּל־נֶפֶשׁ שִׁבְעָה׃
26 כָּל־הַנֶּפֶשׁ הַבָּאָה לְיַעֲקֹב מִצְרַיְמָה
יֹצְאֵי יְרֵכוֹ מִלְּבַד נְשֵׁי בְנֵי־יַעֲקֹב כָּל־נֶפֶשׁ
שִׁשִּׁים וָשֵׁשׁ׃ 27 וּבְנֵי יוֹסֵף אֲשֶׁר־יֻלַּד־לוֹ
בְּמִצְרַיִם נֶפֶשׁ שְׁנָיִם כָּל־הַנֶּפֶשׁ לְבֵית־
יַעֲקֹב הַבָּאָה מִצְרַיְמָה שִׁבְעִים׃ פ

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ We read that "all the persons belonging to Jacob who came to Egypt . . . numbered 66" (v. 26) when there are really 67 of them; now add Joseph's sons, "two in number" (v. 27). Whether you add two to 66 or 67, how can you get "seventy persons"?

RASHI **26 All the persons belonging to Jacob who came to Egypt**. Again, as the accent on the verb shows, it is the persons who "were coming" to Egypt. At the time they left for Egypt, there were 66 of them. But the next verse, using almost the same expression, correctly says that "those who came" were 70 persons. The accent on the verb in v. 27 is different; it really is a past tense verb there. When they arrived, they found Joseph and his two sons there, and Jochebed was added to them "between the walls." According to those who say a twin girl was born with each of Jacob's sons, we must assume these twins died before the family went down to Egypt, since they are not listed here. **All these persons numbered 66**. More literally, "all the souls" (OJPS). But in fact the Hebrew really says "all the soul," using a singular noun. In Leviticus Rabbah I found the following: Esau's family numbered only six, yet they are called "all the *souls* of his house" (36:6, OJPS) because they all worshiped different gods. Jacob's family totaled 70, but the text calls them a single "soul" because they all worshiped one and the same God.

KIMHI **25 7 persons in all**. Some of these comments use masculine numbers, since "body" is a masculine word in Hebrew; some use feminine numbers, since "person" or "soul" (OJPS) is a feminine word.

27 Who came to Egypt. They did not come to Egypt City, the capital, but to Goshen, which is part of the *land* of Egypt.

NAHMANIDES **26 All the persons belonging to Jacob who came to Egypt**. Rashi's comment about the twins is unnecessary. If each of Jacob's sons married one of the others' twin sisters, then these sisters were their wives. And our verse specifically excludes them from the count: **His own issue, aside from the wives of Jacob's sons**. They are not listed here any more than they were when they were born. They would not be so much as mentioned even here were it not for the fact that this generation multiplied so greatly in Egypt, all from these 70 souls—another great miracle. The wives are not mentioned because man and wife are one.

RASHBAM **26 His own issue, aside from the wives of Jacob's sons—all these persons numbered 66**. Jacob, who was one of the 33 in v. 15, is certainly not one of "his own issue." There were a total of 69 who were of Jacob's issue. When Moses says, "Your ancestors went down to Egypt seventy persons in all" (Deut. 10:22), he is counting Jacob along with the 69 of his own issue.

IBN EZRA **21 Naaman**. This is the Naaman who was Benjamin's son; there is another Naaman among his grandsons. **[F]**

23 Dan's son: Hushim. The Hebrew really says Dan's "sons" (OJPS), so there may have been two of them, of whom one died, without the text bothering to mention it. Or else that is simply how the language works.

27 Seventy persons. One commentator says "seventy" here is simply rounded up from the actual total of 69. But he has gone astray. For v. 15 arrives at a total of 33 when there were really only 32. As for the midrash that Jochebed was born "between the walls," it is somewhat surprising that the Torah makes no mention of her miraculously giving birth to Moses at the age of 130 but makes a big deal of Sarah giving birth at 90. (As if that were not bad enough, the liturgical poetry for Simchat Torah offers condolences to Jochebed on the death of Moses, when she would have to be 250. With regard to the legend that Ahijah of Shiloh lived long enough to know both Moses' father, Amram, and the prophet Elijah . . . well, whoever said that is entitled to his opinion.) What I think is that the "persons in all" of v. 15 are meant to include Jacob as well. Note that v. 8 says this is a list of "Jacob and his descendants." As for "the total number of persons that were of Jacob's issue came to seventy" (Exod. 1:5), that *is* a case where the text has no problem using a round number, just as it implicitly includes Benjamin among "the sons of Jacob who were born to him in Paddan-aram" (35:26), though Benjamin was not born there. Our passage has two more witnesses to the correctness of what I am saying: first, v. 8, which includes Jacob among "the Israelites" who came to Egypt; and second, our own verse, where the total "who came to Egypt" is 70 persons, though Ephraim and Manasseh certainly did not "come" to Egypt—they were born there. Since Deut. 10:22 also says, "Your ancestors went down to Egypt seventy persons in all"—including the two who did not "go" down to Egypt—it is quite clear that Jacob must be included in our total of 70. He is a "person" too, in fact the most important one.

[F] See Num. 26:40.

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NJPS [28]He had sent Judah ahead of him to Joseph, to point the way before him to Goshen. So when they came to the region of Goshen, [29]Joseph ordered his chariot and went to Goshen to meet his father Israel; he presented himself to him and, embracing him around the neck, he wept on his neck a good while. [30]Then Israel said to Joseph, "Now I can die, having seen for myself that you are still alive."

[31]Then Joseph said to his brothers and to his father's household, "I will go up and tell the news to Pharaoh, and say to him, 'My brothers and my father's household, who were in the land of Canaan, have come

ששי

28 וְאֶת־יְהוּדָה שָׁלַח לְפָנָיו אֶל־יוֹסֵף
לְהוֹרֹת לְפָנָיו גֹּשְׁנָה וַיָּבֹאוּ אַרְצָה גֹּשֶׁן׃
29 וַיֶּאְסֹר יוֹסֵף מֶרְכַּבְתּוֹ וַיַּעַל לִקְרַאת־
יִשְׂרָאֵל אָבִיו גֹּשְׁנָה וַיֵּרָא אֵלָיו וַיִּפֹּל
עַל־צַוָּארָיו וַיֵּבְךְּ עַל־צַוָּארָיו עוֹד׃
30 וַיֹּאמֶר יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶל־יוֹסֵף אָמוּתָה הַפָּעַם
אַחֲרֵי רְאוֹתִי אֶת־פָּנֶיךָ כִּי עוֹדְךָ חָי׃
31 וַיֹּאמֶר יוֹסֵף אֶל־אֶחָיו וְאֶל־בֵּית אָבִיו
אֶעֱלֶה וְאַגִּידָה לְפַרְעֹה וְאֹמְרָה אֵלָיו אַחַי
וּבֵית־אָבִי אֲשֶׁר בְּאֶרֶץ־כְּנַעַן בָּאוּ אֵלָי׃

OJPS [28]And he sent Judah before him unto Joseph, to show the way before him unto Goshen; and they came into the land of Goshen. [29]And Joseph made ready his chariot, and went up to meet Israel his father, to Goshen; and he presented himself unto him, and fell on his neck, and wept on his neck a good while. [30]And Israel said unto Joseph: "Now let me die, since I have seen thy face, that thou art yet alive."

[31]And Joseph said unto his brethren, and unto his father's house: "I will go up, and tell Pharaoh, and will say unto him: My brethren, and my father's house, who were in the land of Canaan, are come unto

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why did Jacob send Judah "ahead of him to Joseph, to point the way before him to Goshen" (v. 28), when they as yet had no idea where they were going to settle? ✦ Since it seems Judah did not bring back an answer from Joseph, how did they "come to the region of Goshen"?

RASHI **28 To point the way before him.** As Onkelos translates, "to clear the area for him and to point out to him the way he could settle there." But "before" does not mean "in front of" here. It means that he showed him this *before* he got there. The midrash takes "to point" even more literally as "to teach." He prepared a house of study for him there, from which instruction could come forth.

29 Joseph ordered his chariot. In fact, he "harnessed" his chariot (compare OJPS). He himself harnessed the horses to his chariot, so eager was he to do honor to his father. **He presented himself to him.** Rather, Joseph "appeared to"—literally, "he was seen by"—his father. **He wept on his neck a good while.** He wept "a great deal." He cried much more than might be expected. But Jacob neither put his arms around Joseph's neck nor kissed him; according to our Sages, he was reciting the Shema.

30 Now I can die. As Onkelos translates, "If I were to die now, I would die happy." But a midrash has Jacob saying this: I expected to die twice, from this world and from the World to Come, for the Shekhinah had left me. I thought the Holy One would charge me with your death. But now that you are still alive, "I can die" just the one time.

KIMHI **28 He had sent Judah ahead of him to Joseph, to point the way before him to Goshen.** Or perhaps to find out for them where they should go and what they should do when they got into town.

29 He presented himself to him. Literally, Joseph "appeared to him." My grandfather explains that Joseph appeared to him from far off, so they could tell him in advance, "There's Joseph coming to meet you!" He did not want to appear to him suddenly. **He wept on his neck a good while.** Rather, "he wept more [and more]." Every time he stopped crying, he would stand up and then go back and cry some more. Notice that Jacob did not weep "on Joseph's neck," but he certainly must have wept.

31 Then Joseph said to his brothers and to his father's household. First, undoubtedly, requesting permission from his father to do so. **I will go up and tell the news to Pharaoh.** Joseph could certainly not go "up" from Egypt to Goshen to meet his father (see OJPS to v. 29) and now turn around and go back "up" from Goshen to Egypt. In our verse, the expression means, "I will get up [on my chariot]."

IBN EZRA **29 Joseph ordered his chariot.** Despite the literal Hebrew, NJPS is correct; compare "Solomon built the house" (1 Kings 6:14).

NAHMANIDES **29 He presented himself to him and, embracing him around the neck, he wept on his neck a good while.** I do not understand Rashi's point. Once Joseph "fell on his neck" (OJPS), isn't it obvious that they have seen each other? Moreover, it was hardly proper for Joseph to "fall on his father's neck." He ought to have prostrated himself, as he does in 48:12, or perhaps kissed his hands. Prostration would have been more appropriate for this particular occasion. As for "a good while," the Hebrew word does not mean either that or "a great deal." It refers to something extra, something additional. What I think is that Jacob's eyesight had deteriorated somewhat due to his age. When Joseph arrived in the chariot of Pharaoh's second-in-command, turbaned like an Egyptian king, he was completely unrecognizable to his father. Remember that his brothers had also not recognized him. So when he appeared to his father and his father at last recognized him, *his father* fell on *Joseph's* neck and wept *still more* over him, as he had been weeping during all those years when he had not seen him. It is obvious: Who would weep more, the elderly father who finds his son alive after years of loss and mourning, or the young son who is the ruler of Egypt? Just see how Jacob reacts in v. 30. (The fact that that verse begins with "Israel said" does not mean that the primary subject of our verse must be Joseph all the way through. See 41:48, where "he" is Joseph, though his name is not mentioned until v. 49. This is quite a common phenomenon, in the Torah and throughout the Bible.)

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **28 He had sent Judah ahead of him to Joseph, to point the way before him to Goshen.** That is, Jacob had sent Judah to Joseph so he could show Joseph where in Goshen Jacob was (Abarbanel).

29 He presented himself to him. Rather, he "appeared" to him, was "seen" by him. We are told this to let us know that the situation of 48:10, when "Israel's eyes were dim with age," was not yet in place; at this point Jacob could see perfectly well (Bekhor Shor). **He wept on his neck a good while.** Rather, he wept "more" than was normal (Gersonides).

31 I will go up and tell the news to Pharaoh. That you are shepherds, so that he will believe you when you tell him so. I do not want him to think that you are just saying that so he will give you the land of Goshen (Sforno).

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NJPS to me. 32The men are shepherds; they have always been breeders of livestock, and they have brought with them their flocks and herds and all that is theirs.' 33So when Pharaoh summons you and asks, 'What is your occupation?' 34you shall answer, 'Your servants have been breeders of livestock from the start until now, both we and our fathers'—so that you may stay in the region of Goshen. For all shepherds are abhorrent to Egyptians."

47 Then Joseph came and reported to Pharaoh, saying, "My father and my brothers, with their flocks and herds and all that is theirs, have come from the land of Canaan and are now in the region of Goshen." 2And selecting a few of his brothers, he presented them to

OJPS me; 32and the men are shepherds, for they have been keepers of cattle; and they have brought their flocks, and their herds, and all that they have. 33And it shall come to pass, when Pharaoh shall call you, and shall say: What is your occupation? 34that ye shall say: Thy servants have been keepers of cattle from our youth even until now, both we, and our fathers; that ye may dwell in the land of Goshen; for every shepherd is an abomination unto the Egyptians."

47 Then Joseph went in and told Pharaoh, and said: "My father and my brethren, and their flocks, and their herds, and all that they have, are come out of the land of Canaan; and, behold, they are in the land of Goshen." 2And from among his brethren he took five men, and presented

32 וְהָאֲנָשִׁים֙ רֹ֣עֵי צֹ֔אן כִּי־אַנְשֵׁ֥י מִקְנֶ֖ה הָי֑וּ
וְצֹאנָ֧ם וּבְקָרָ֛ם וְכָל־אֲשֶׁר־לָהֶ֖ם הֵבִ֥יאוּ׃
33 וְהָיָ֕ה כִּֽי־יִקְרָ֥א לָכֶ֖ם פַּרְעֹ֑ה וְאָמַ֖ר מַה־
מַּעֲשֵׂיכֶֽם׃ 34 וַאֲמַרְתֶּ֗ם אַנְשֵׁ֤י מִקְנֶה֙ הָי֣וּ
עֲבָדֶ֔יךָ מִנְּעוּרֵ֖ינוּ וְעַד־עַתָּ֣ה גַּם־אֲנָ֑חְנוּ
גַּם־אֲבֹתֵ֔ינוּ בַּעֲב֥וּר תֵּשְׁב֖וּ בְּאֶ֣רֶץ גֹּ֑שֶׁן
כִּֽי־תוֹעֲבַ֥ת מִצְרַ֖יִם כָּל־רֹ֥עֵה צֹֽאן׃

מז וַיָּבֹ֣א יוֹסֵ֔ף וַיַּגֶּד֙ לְפַרְעֹ֔ה וַיֹּ֕אמֶר
אָבִ֥י וְאַחַ֖י וְצֹאנָ֣ם וּבְקָרָ֑ם וְכָל־אֲשֶׁר־לָהֶ֕ם
בָּ֖אוּ מֵאֶ֣רֶץ כְּנָ֑עַן וְהִנָּ֖ם בְּאֶ֥רֶץ גֹּֽשֶׁן׃
2 וּמִקְצֵ֣ה אֶחָ֔יו לָקַ֖ח חֲמִשָּׁ֣ה אֲנָשִׁ֑ים

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Once Joseph tells Pharaoh that his brothers are "breeders of livestock" (v. 32), why must the brothers (in v. 34) tell him the same thing? ✦ Given that "all shepherds are abhorrent to Egyptians" (v. 34), why would they expect to be given good land once the Egyptians find out they are shepherds?
✦ Why is what Joseph "reports" to Pharaoh (v. 1) different from what he told his brothers (in 46:31–32) that he would say?

RASHI **32 The men are shepherds.** As the translations make clear, this is not a resumption of the narrative; Joseph is still speaking.

34 So that you may stay in the region of Goshen. Which you need, since that is pastureland. When you tell him you are no good at anything else, he will send you as far away as possible from himself and settle you there. **For all shepherds are abhorrent to Egyptians.** Because the Egyptians worship sheep.

47:2 A few of his brothers. Literally, "five" of them (OJPS)—five of the less formidable of them, those who did not look particularly powerful. For if Pharaoh saw how powerful they were he would have made them soldiers. **He presented them to Pharaoh.** And here are the five he presented: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Issachar, and Benjamin, all the ones whose names are not repeated in the Blessing of Moses in Deuteronomy 33. But the names of the powerful ones *are* repeated there: Judah (in v. 7 there), Gad (in v. 20), Naphtali (in v. 23), Dan (in v. 22), Zebulun (in v. 18), and Asher (in v. 24). That is what it says in Genesis Rabbah, which is a midrash from the land of Israel. But in our Babylonian Talmud we find the reverse, that the ones whose names are repeated are the weaker ones, and that *they* are the ones Joseph presented to Pharaoh—except for Judah, whose name was not repeated because he was weak, but for a different reason (see B. BK 92a and

RASHBAM **34 For all shepherds are abhorrent to Egyptians.** They consider shepherds despicable, since they find sheep disgusting—whether to eat them or to sacrifice to them: "What we sacrifice to the LORD our God is untouchable to the Egyptians" (Exod. 8:22).

IBN EZRA **34 For all shepherds are abhorrent to Egyptians.** This signifies that in those days the Egyptians did not eat meat, nor would they allow anyone to slaughter sheep. The inhabitants of India follow the same practice nowadays. A shepherd would have been abhorrent to them because shepherds drink milk. The inhabitants of India neither eat nor drink anything that comes from a sentient animal. They are vegans to this day.

47:1 In the region of Goshen. And within Goshen, specifically "in the region of Rameses" (v. 11; and see my comment there).

KIMHI **34 For all shepherds are abhorrent to Egyptians.** Since sheep are not usually raised except for meat, the Egyptians had relatively few of them, just for wool and milk.

NAHMANIDES **32 The men are shepherds; they have always been breeders of livestock.** That is, they are shepherds but not shepherds who tend the flocks of others. Even for their own flocks they have servants and employees who take care of their animals. It is just that their wealth is in livestock. He is not denigrating them but explaining that their great wealth came from breeding livestock.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **32 They have brought with them their flocks and herds and all that is theirs.** They do not intend to return, but to settle in your land and serve you (Bekhor Shor).

34 You shall answer, "Your servants have been breeders of livestock from the start until now." Joseph was afraid that if they became officials in the palace they would have him removed from his post. After all, they had sold him because of an ornamented tunic (Hizkuni). **So that you may stay in the region of Goshen.** Joseph wanted them to settle there, in the little village of Rameses, so that when they increased in number they could all stay together. There was plenty of land surrounding this village, mostly uninhabited. That is why they did not mix with the Egyptians. When "the land" was filled with them (Exod. 1:7), it was this uninhabited land in Goshen that was filled (Gersonides). **For all shepherds are abhorrent to Egyptians.** It makes no sense that Joseph would be disparaging his brothers. I think he is using a dysphemism here. Shepherds were highly honored by the Egyptians because they raised the animals for their obscene sacrifices. Joseph wants the Egyptians to love his brothers and settle them in Goshen, which was good land (Bekhor Shor). See 2 Kings 23:13 for another use of this same dysphemism, along with others (Hizkuni).

47:2 Selecting a few of his brothers, he presented them to Pharaoh. He realized that Pharaoh had not picked up on his hints to let the family settle in Goshen (Abarbanel).

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NJPS Pharaoh. [3]Pharaoh said to his brothers, "What is your occupation?" They answered Pharaoh, "We your servants are shepherds, as were also our fathers. [4]We have come," they told Pharaoh, "to sojourn in this land, for there is no pasture for your servants' flocks, the famine being severe in the land of Canaan. Pray, then, let your servants stay in the region of Goshen." [5]Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "As regards your father and your brothers who have come to you, [6]the land of Egypt is open before you: settle your father and your brothers in the best part of the land; let them stay in the region of Goshen. And if you know any capable men among them, put them in charge of my livestock."

[7]Joseph then brought his father Jacob and presented him to Pharaoh; and Jacob

OJPS them unto Pharaoh. [3]And Pharaoh said unto his brethren: "What is your occupation?" And they said unto Pharaoh: "Thy servants are shepherds, both we, and our fathers." [4]And they said unto Pharaoh: "To sojourn in the land are we come; for there is no pasture for thy servants' flocks; for the famine is sore in the land of Canaan. Now therefore, we pray thee, let thy servants dwell in the land of Goshen." [5]And Pharaoh spoke unto Joseph, saying: "Thy father and thy brethren are come unto thee; [6]the land of Egypt is before thee; in the best of the land make thy father and thy brethren to dwell; in the land of Goshen let them dwell. And if thou knowest any able men among them, then make them rulers over my cattle."

[7]And Joseph brought in Jacob his father, and set him before Pharaoh. And Jacob

וַיַּצִּגֵם לִפְנֵי פַרְעֹה׃ 3 וַיֹּאמֶר פַּרְעֹה אֶל־
אֶחָיו מַה־מַּעֲשֵׂיכֶם וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֶל־פַּרְעֹה
רֹעֵה צֹאן עֲבָדֶיךָ גַּם־אֲנַחְנוּ גַּם־אֲבוֹתֵינוּ׃
4 וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֶל־פַּרְעֹה לָגוּר בָּאָרֶץ בָּאנוּ
כִּי־אֵין מִרְעֶה לַצֹּאן אֲשֶׁר לְעֲבָדֶיךָ כִּי־
כָבֵד הָרָעָב בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן וְעַתָּה יֵשְׁבוּ־נָא
עֲבָדֶיךָ בְּאֶרֶץ גֹּשֶׁן׃ 5 וַיֹּאמֶר פַּרְעֹה אֶל־
יוֹסֵף לֵאמֹר אָבִיךָ וְאַחֶיךָ בָּאוּ אֵלֶיךָ׃
6 אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לְפָנֶיךָ הִוא בְּמֵיטַב הָאָרֶץ
הוֹשֵׁב אֶת־אָבִיךָ וְאֶת־אַחֶיךָ יֵשְׁבוּ בְּאֶרֶץ
גֹּשֶׁן וְאִם־יָדַעְתָּ וְיֶשׁ־בָּם אַנְשֵׁי־חַיִל
וְשַׂמְתָּם שָׂרֵי מִקְנֶה עַל־אֲשֶׁר־לִי׃
7 וַיָּבֵא יוֹסֵף אֶת־יַעֲקֹב אָבִיו וַיַּעֲמִדֵהוּ
לִפְנֵי פַרְעֹה וַיְבָרֶךְ יַעֲקֹב אֶת־פַּרְעֹה׃

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why must the brothers "say to Pharaoh" (compare OJPS) what they say both in v. 3 and in v. 4? Why is one "they said" not enough? ✦ Why did they ask Pharaoh to "let your servants stay in the region of Goshen" (v. 4)? In 46:34 Joseph had told them what to say to get Pharaoh to make that offer on his own—and *not* to ask for it explicitly. ✦ Why does Pharaoh tell Joseph, "Your father and your brothers have come to you" (v. 5, but see the accurate translation in OJPS), when it is obvious: Joseph had just told him the same thing in v. 1?

RASHI B. Mak. 11b). **[E]** The Sifrei to Deuteronomy 33 teaches it the way our Talmud does.

6 Capable men. Skilled at their trade of shepherding. **Put them in charge of my livestock.** Literally "in charge of mine." But the translations understand the sense correctly.

7 Jacob greeted Pharaoh. That is the sense of the expression "Jacob blessed Pharaoh" (OJPS) here. He asked after Pharaoh's

[E] Moses was praying for the bones of Judah, which the Israelites, according to legend, were carrying back to Canaan; the bones were jumbled up because they did not want to cooperate (because of Judah's oath).

KIMHI 47:7 Joseph then brought his father Jacob and presented him to Pharaoh; and Jacob greeted Pharaoh. I cannot find any reason for this story to have been written.

RASHBAM 47:4 To sojourn in this land. Not because we lack money, but for pastureland for our sheep. — They want to make sure Pharaoh does not think they have come down to Egypt to sponge off Joseph.

6 Capable men. Powerful and authoritative. Boaz uses the feminine singular form of the same expression to describe Ruth in Ruth 3:11.

IBN EZRA 6 My livestock. Horses, donkeys, and so forth.

NAHMANIDES 47:4 We have come . . . to sojourn in this land, for there is no pasture for your servants' flocks. I am surprised at this explanation. There was no pasture for the flocks in Egypt either, the famine being as "severe" there as in Canaan and perhaps more so. For this was a famine that was primarily decreed against Egypt. Perhaps they meant that in Canaan the severity of the famine led people to eat grass from the pastures, not leaving anything for the livestock. But in Egypt, where grain had been stored up, the people could eat that and there was at least a little pasture for the animals. And perhaps there was some pasture for the animals in the reed grass, because of the ponds and canals.

5 As regards your father and your brothers who have come to you. The Hebrew says merely "your father and your brothers have come to you." But Pharaoh is just opening conversation with him: "I hear that your father and your brothers have come."

6 The land of Egypt is open before you. I suspect Pharaoh meant, "Your father and your brothers must have come down because they heard of your high position here, and they are putting the onus of supporting them on you. Do right by them. It is your responsibility, and you have the power to do so."

7 Jacob greeted Pharaoh. I disagree with Rashi. It is not protocol for a visitor to ask the king how he is doing. Does a slave ask how his master is doing? Rather, Jacob literally "blessed Pharaoh" (OJPS). It is in fact common for pious elders who are brought into the presence of kings to offer them blessings for wealth and honor and the advancement of their kingdoms: "May my lord King David live

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS 4 "We have come," they told Pharaoh, "to sojourn in this land." Just to "sojourn" until the worst of the famine was over. They had to continue speaking, since Pharaoh had not responded to what they said in v. 3 (Abarbanel). **Pray, then, let your servants stay in the region of Goshen.** Contrary to Joseph's original plan, they had to come right out and ask specifically for this, since Pharaoh had not responded as expected (Abarbanel).

5 As regards your father and your brothers who have come to you. I know perfectly well that they did not come here for pasture for the animals. They came to see you and get you to help them over this tough time. So I do not want to give Goshen to them; I want *you* to give it to them (Abarbanel).

6 Settle your father and your brothers in the best part of the land; let them stay in the region of Goshen. This ignores the Hebrew word order. The verse should be translated, "Settle your father in the best part of the land [for he is old and needs nothing but rest and fresh air]; and your brothers, [who are young and strong,] let them stay in the region of Goshen" where there is pasture (Hizkuni). **Capable men.** Elsewhere the expression sometimes means "able warriors." But since it is used of Ruth in Ruth 3:11, we know that it can refer to someone "capable." It is not the custom for women to go into combat (Hizkuni). Since Pharaoh asks for "capable men" to be put "in charge of my livestock," we see that the Egyptians did not in fact despise shepherds, but honored them (Abarbanel).

7 Jacob greeted Pharaoh. But neither now nor when he leaves does he bow down to Pharaoh (Sforno).

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NJPS greeted Pharaoh. [8]Pharaoh asked Jacob, "How many are the years of your life?" [9]And Jacob answered Pharaoh, "The years of my sojourn [on earth] are one hundred and thirty. Few and hard have been the years of my life, nor do they come up to the life spans of my fathers during their sojourns." [10]Then Jacob bade Pharaoh farewell, and left Pharaoh's presence.

[11]So Joseph settled his father and his brothers, giving them holdings in the choicest part of the land of Egypt, in the region of Rameses, as Pharaoh had commanded. [12]Joseph sustained his father, and his brothers, and all his father's household with bread, down to the little ones.

8 וַיֹּאמֶר פַּרְעֹה אֶל־יַעֲקֹב כַּמָּה יְמֵי שְׁנֵי
חַיֶּיךָ׃ 9 וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב אֶל־פַּרְעֹה יְמֵי שְׁנֵי
מְגוּרַי שְׁלֹשִׁים וּמְאַת שָׁנָה מְעַט וְרָעִים
הָיוּ יְמֵי שְׁנֵי חַיַּי וְלֹא הִשִּׂיגוּ אֶת־יְמֵי שְׁנֵי
חַיֵּי אֲבֹתַי בִּימֵי מְגוּרֵיהֶם׃ 10 וַיְבָרֶךְ יַעֲקֹב
אֶת־פַּרְעֹה וַיֵּצֵא מִלִּפְנֵי פַרְעֹה׃
11 וַיּוֹשֶׁב יוֹסֵף אֶת־אָבִיו וְאֶת־אֶחָיו וַיִּתֵּן
לָהֶם אֲחֻזָּה בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם בְּמֵיטַב הָאָרֶץ
בְּאֶרֶץ רַעְמְסֵס כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה פַּרְעֹה׃
12 וַיְכַלְכֵּל יוֹסֵף אֶת־אָבִיו וְאֶת־אֶחָיו וְאֶת
כָּל־בֵּית אָבִיו לֶחֶם לְפִי הַטָּף׃

OJPS blessed Pharaoh. [8]And Pharaoh said unto Jacob: "How many are the days of the years of thy life?" [9]And Jacob said unto Pharaoh: "The days of the years of my sojournings are a hundred and thirty years; few and evil have been the days of the years of my life, and they have not attained unto the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their sojournings." [10]And Jacob blessed Pharaoh, and went out from the presence of Pharaoh.

[11]And Joseph placed his father and his brethren, and gave them a possession in the land of Egypt, in the best of the land, in the land of Rameses, as Pharaoh had commanded. [12]And Joseph sustained his father, and his brethren, and all his father's household, with bread, according to the want of their little ones.

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why does Jacob refer to his life as "the years of my sojourn" (v. 9)? What does sojourning have to do with one's age? ✦ How can he say that his years "do not come up to the life spans of my fathers"? Who told him that he would not outlive them?

RASHI welfare, as is the custom of those who appear before royalty infrequently.

9 The years of my sojourn. All my days I have been a sojourner, a stranger, in the lands of others. **Nor do they come up.** In happiness.

10 Then Jacob bade Pharaoh farewell. Again, literally, "Jacob blessed Pharaoh" (OJPS). Jacob is following protocol, asking permission to leave and parting from Pharaoh with a wish for his welfare. And what blessing did Jacob offer? That the Nile should rise up to his feet. For the land of Egypt does not drink rain; the Nile must rise and water it. Ever after Jacob's blessing, Pharaoh would go to the Nile and it would rise to meet him and water the land (see the Tanhuma).

11 In the region of Rameses. Which was in the land of Goshen.

12 Down to the little ones. That is, he provided each household proportionately with as much as it needed.

RASHBAM **9 Few and hard.** Jacob looked very old to Pharaoh (which is why he asked his age). Jacob replied, "I am not as old as you think—but I have had a hard life."

IBN EZRA **11 In the region of Rameses.** Note that the ע is marked as the end of a syllable. In my opinion, the "Raamses" of Exod. 1:11 is a different place entirely—one of the garrison cities of Pharaoh, not the place mentioned here where they originally settled. Note the different spelling.

KIMHI **9 Few and hard have been the years of my life.** How could he tell that his years would be few? His hard life had left him so weak that he was sure he could not live much longer. **Nor do they come up to the life spans of my fathers.** They do not match them either in length or in happiness.

11 Giving them holdings in the choicest part of the land of Egypt, in the region of Rameses, as Pharaoh had commanded. Rameses was near Goshen. Joseph would not have needed Pharaoh's permission to give this land to anyone else—after all, he was "lord of all Egypt" (45:9)—but he would not have given it to his brothers without Pharaoh's permission. It would not have looked right.

12 With bread, down to the little ones. Literally, "with bread to the mouth of the little ones" who were nibbling all day long. As the expression goes, "Babies eat through bread the way buildings eat through money."

NAHMANIDES forever!" (1 Kings 1:31). In v. 10 as well "Jacob blessed Pharaoh" (OJPS) to ask permission to leave his presence. And the Sages say Jacob brought actual blessing: the Nile rose at his feet. **[Y]**

9 Few and hard have been the years of my life. I do not know how our elderly Patriarch found it proper to complain in this way to the king. **Nor do they come up to the life spans of my fathers during their sojourns.** But they might yet do so, or even exceed them. It appears to me that Jacob must have looked extremely old, for most people in those times no longer lived to such great ages. That would explain why Pharaoh asked him, "How many are the years of your life?" (v. 8): "I have never seen anyone as old as you anywhere in my kingdom!" Jacob then told him that his own 130 years were in fact no surprise, for his ancestors had lived longer. But due to his hard life, he looked much older at 130 than his ancestors had at their greater ages.

11 So Joseph settled his father and his brothers, giving them holdings in the choicest part of the land of Egypt. He "settled" them because he did not want them living like sojourners. So he bought them houses and gave them holdings of fields and vineyards. This was all with Pharaoh's permission, for they had originally told Pharaoh, "We have come to *sojourn* in this land [v. 4], not to reside permanently. When the famine is over, we will go home." But Pharaoh told Joseph, "*Settle* your father and your brothers in the best part of the land" (v. 5). He was to treat them like anyone else who was settled in Goshen.

[Y] See Rashi's comment to v. 10.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **8 How many are the years of your life?** It is not a question but an exclamation of surprise: "How many are the years of your life!" (Abarbanel). **Few and hard have been the years of my life.** Why did Jacob live 33 years less than his father, Isaac? A midrash: The Holy One said to him, "I rescued you from Laban and Esau and Shechem, and gave Dinah and Joseph back to you—and you are complaining?! I swear, I will deduct this complaint from your account." And indeed vv. 8–9 were deducted from his life, one year for each of the 33 Hebrew words in those verses (Hizkuni).

12 Down to the little ones. More precisely, "according to the want of their little ones" (OJPS). He did not want to give them too much; as the Sages say, "When the general public is experiencing trouble, no one should say, 'I will just go home and eat and drink, and *I'll* be fine'" (Sforno).

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NJPS 13Now there was no bread in all the world, for the famine was very severe; both the land of Egypt and the land of Canaan languished because of the famine. 14Joseph gathered in all the money that was to be found in the land of Egypt and in the land of Canaan, as payment for the rations that were being procured, and Joseph brought the money into Pharaoh's palace. 15And when the money gave out in the land of Egypt and in the land of Canaan, all the Egyptians came to Joseph and said, "Give us bread, lest we die before your very eyes; for the money is gone!" 16And Joseph said, "Bring your livestock, and I will sell to you against your livestock, if the money is gone." 17So they brought their livestock to Joseph, and Joseph gave them bread in exchange for the horses, for the stocks of sheep and cattle, and the asses; thus he provided them with bread that year in exchange for all their

OJPS 13And there was no bread in all the land; for the famine was very sore, so that the land of Egypt and the land of Canaan languished by reason of the famine. 14And Joseph gathered up all the money that was found in the land of Egypt, and in the land of Canaan, for the corn which they bought; and Joseph brought the money into Pharaoh's house. 15And when the money was all spent in the land of Egypt, and in the land of Canaan, all the Egyptians came unto Joseph, and said: "Give us bread; for why should we die in thy presence? for our money faileth." 16And Joseph said: "Give your cattle, and I will give you [bread] for your cattle, if money fail." 17And they brought their cattle unto Joseph. And Joseph gave them bread in exchange for the horses, and for the flocks, and for the herds, and for the asses; and he fed them with bread in exchange for all their cattle

13 וְלֶחֶם אֵין בְּכָל־הָאָרֶץ כִּי־כָבֵד הָרָעָב
מְאֹד וַתֵּלַהּ אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם וְאֶרֶץ כְּנַעַן מִפְּנֵי
הָרָעָב׃ 14 וַיְלַקֵּט יוֹסֵף אֶת־כָּל־הַכֶּסֶף
הַנִּמְצָא בְּאֶרֶץ־מִצְרַיִם וּבְאֶרֶץ כְּנַעַן
בַּשֶּׁבֶר אֲשֶׁר־הֵם שֹׁבְרִים וַיָּבֵא יוֹסֵף אֶת־
הַכֶּסֶף בֵּיתָה פַּרְעֹה׃ 15 וַיִּתֹּם הַכֶּסֶף
מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם וּמֵאֶרֶץ כְּנַעַן וַיָּבֹאוּ כָל־
מִצְרַיִם אֶל־יוֹסֵף לֵאמֹר הָבָה־לָּנוּ לֶחֶם
וְלָמָּה נָמוּת נֶגְדֶּךָ כִּי אָפֵס כָּסֶף׃ 16 וַיֹּאמֶר
יוֹסֵף הָבוּ מִקְנֵיכֶם וְאֶתְּנָה לָכֶם בְּמִקְנֵיכֶם
אִם־אָפֵס כָּסֶף׃ 17 וַיָּבִיאוּ אֶת־מִקְנֵיהֶם
אֶל־יוֹסֵף וַיִּתֵּן לָהֶם יוֹסֵף לֶחֶם בַּסּוּסִים
וּבְמִקְנֵה הַצֹּאן וּבְמִקְנֵה הַבָּקָר וּבַחֲמֹרִים
וַיְנַהֲלֵם בַּלֶּחֶם בְּכָל־מִקְנֵהֶם בַּשָּׁנָה

RASHI **13 Now there was no bread in all the world.** Our story returns to the beginning years of the famine. **Languished.** The translations follow Onkelos. They were "tired" of the famine and exhausted by it.

14 As payment for the rations that were being procured. The Hebrew merely says "for" (OJPS); NJPS clarifies that they were giving Joseph the money "as payment" for the rations.

15 For the money is gone! As Onkelos translates, "it is completed"—completely used up.

17 He provided them with bread. Literally, he "led" them with bread; compare "She has none to *guide* her" (Isa. 51:18); "He *leads* me to water in places of repose" (Ps. 23:2).

KIMHI **13 Languished.** Rather, they "were crazy." Famine drives people mad. Note the use of this root in Prov. 26:18 to mean "madman."

14 Joseph gathered in all the money. This stage began at the end of the second year of the famine (since for the first two years they were living on what was left them from the seven years of plenty) and lasted for three years. Jacob had arrived during the second year of the famine; see 45:6. **Joseph brought the money into Pharaoh's palace.** We learn how reliable Joseph was. He could simply have salted the money away in his own house, for Pharaoh never asked him for an accounting, knowing that he could be trusted. Nonetheless, Joseph made sure to keep suspicion far from himself. Whenever money would come in, he would bring it to the palace.

15 And when the money gave out in the land of Egypt and in the land of Canaan, all the Egyptians came to Joseph. The Canaanites went elsewhere. This was the sixth year of the famine, when Joseph sold them grain for their livestock; in the seventh year, he gave them what they needed to eat that year and what they needed to sow for the eighth year in return for their land. If Jacob brought blessing to Egypt, as the midrash says, then when did the money run out?

RASHBAM **13 Both the land of Egypt and the land of Canaan.** The lands farther away than Canaan did not come down to Egypt. Either they were too far from Egypt, or the famine was not as severe there. **Languished.** Note the *mappiq* in the ה, indicating that it is a genuine root letter and not the ה derived from י of ל״ה verbs. You will find a grammatically comparable example in "my eyes *fail*" of Job 17:7.

IBN EZRA **13 Languished.** See the same verb pattern (with a different root) in "she *wandered* about" (21:14). Both roots also appear in the same unusual noun form: "madman" (Prov. 26:18) for our root and "trickster" (27:12) for the root used in 21:14. Both roots have not merely similar sounds but essentially the same meaning: they describe a person who has no idea what he is doing.

15 The money gave out. The verb is geminate; compare the similar form in "the sun *stood still*" (Josh. 10:13).

16 Bring your livestock. The ה of the imperative should really be pointed with a compound *sheva*. **[G] The money is gone.** This is a past tense verb; for the form, compare "he was *afraid*" (19:30).

[G] Like "do" of 45:19.

NAHMANIDES **14 Joseph gathered in all the money that was to be found in the land of Egypt.** The rest of the chapter is demonstrating that Joseph not only had great wisdom, understanding, and knowledge, but was completely reliable: **Joseph brought the money into Pharaoh's palace.** He did not stockpile wealth for himself in secret places in Egypt, nor did he send any of it to Canaan. He gave all the money to the king, who trusted him, and used it to buy the farmland of the Egyptians and their persons. Not the king alone but the people as well were "grateful" (v. 25) for what Joseph did. The Holy One brings success to those who fear him.

15 And when the money gave out in the land of Egypt and in the land of Canaan, all the Egyptians came to Joseph. We had to be told that the money had given out in Canaan as well, for the Egyptians who came to Joseph would certainly have pointed this out. **Give us bread, lest we die before your very eyes; for the money is gone!** The money is gone from Canaan as well, so no one from there will be coming any longer to buy grain. If you let us die for nothing, all the grain will remain in your hands, but there will be no one to buy it.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **17 Thus he provided them with bread that year.** Little by little; as the physicians tell us, satiety after famine can actually cause fatal illness (Sforno).

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NJPS livestock. 18And when that year was ended, they came to him the next year and said to him, "We cannot hide from my lord that, with all the money and animal stocks consigned to my lord, nothing is left at my lord's disposal save our persons and our farmland. 19Let us not perish before your eyes, both we and our land. Take us and our land in exchange for bread, and we with our land will be serfs to Pharaoh; provide the seed, that we may live and not die, and that the land may not become a waste."

20So Joseph gained possession of all the farm land of Egypt for Pharaoh, every Egyptian having sold his field because the famine was too much for them; thus the

OJPS for that year. 18And when that year was ended, they came unto him the second year, and said unto him: "We will not hide from my lord, how that our money is all spent; and the herds of cattle are my lord's; there is nought left in the sight of my lord, but our bodies, and our lands. 19Wherefore should we die before thine eyes, both we and our land? buy us and our land for bread, and we and our land will be bondmen unto Pharaoh; and give us seed, that we may live, and not die, and that the land be not desolate."

20So Joseph bought all the land of Egypt for Pharaoh; for the Egyptians sold every man his field, because the famine was sore

הַהֽוּא׃ 18 וַתִּתֹּם֙ הַשָּׁנָ֣ה הַהִ֔וא וַיָּבֹ֥אוּ אֵלָ֖יו בַּשָּׁנָ֣ה הַשֵּׁנִ֑ית וַיֹּ֣אמְרוּ לוֹ֩ לֹֽא־נְכַחֵ֨ד מֵֽאֲדֹנִ֜י כִּ֣י אִם־תַּ֣ם הַכֶּ֗סֶף וּמִקְנֵ֤ה הַבְּהֵמָה֙ אֶל־אֲדֹנִ֔י לֹ֥א נִשְׁאַ֖ר לִפְנֵ֣י אֲדֹנִ֑י בִּלְתִּ֗י אִם־גְּוִיָּ֙תֵ֙נוּ֙ וְאַדְמָתֵ֔נוּ׃ 19 לָמָ֣ה נָמ֔וּת לְעֵינֶ֖יךָ גַּם־אֲנַ֣חְנוּ גַם־אַדְמָתֵ֑נוּ קְנֵה־אֹתָ֨נוּ֙ וְאֶת־אַדְמָתֵ֔נוּ בַּלָּ֖חֶם וְנִֽהְיֶ֣ה אֲנַ֤חְנוּ וְאַדְמָתֵ֙נוּ֙ עֲבָדִ֣ים לְפַרְעֹ֔ה וְתֵ֥ן־זֶ֖רַע וְנִֽחְיֶ֣ה וְלֹ֣א נָמ֔וּת וְהָאֲדָמָ֖ה לֹ֥א תֵשָֽׁם׃ 20 וַיִּקֶן֩ יוֹסֵ֨ף אֶת־כָּל־אַדְמַ֤ת מִצְרַ֙יִם֙ לְפַרְעֹ֔ה כִּֽי־מָכְר֥וּ מִצְרַ֛יִם אִ֥ישׁ שָׂדֵ֖הוּ כִּֽי־חָזַ֣ק עֲלֵהֶ֣ם הָרָעָ֑ב וַתְּהִ֥י הָאָ֖רֶץ

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why do the Egyptians tell Joseph, "We cannot hide from my lord" (v. 18) that our money and livestock are gone? What would be the point of "hiding" this? ✦ How could Egypt "suddenly be ruined" (to paraphrase Ps. 73:19) in such a way that the second year of the famine already found all the previous abundance gone?

RASHI **18 The next year**. Literally, the "second" year (OJPS) of the famine. **We cannot hide from my lord that . . . nothing is left**. Literally, we cannot hide "whether anything is left." But the translations understand the sense.

19 Provide the seed. So that we may sow the land. Despite what Joseph said in 45:6—"there are still five years to come in which there shall be no yield from tilling"—now Jacob had come to Egypt, and blessing came in his wake. They began to sow once again, and the famine came to an end (see the Tosefta to Tractate Sotah). **That the land may not become a waste**. A "desolate" (OJPS) land that cannot be cultivated.

20 The land passed over to Pharaoh. As his acquisition.

IBN EZRA **19 Let us not perish before your eyes, both we and our land**. Do not be surprised at the notion that the land might "die" (OJPS). You will find the opposite notion in "You made the heavens, the highest heavens, and all their host, the earth and everything upon it, the seas and everything in them. You keep them all alive" (Neh. 9:6). **That the land may not become a waste**. For the verb "to become a waste," compare "the towns shall be laid waste and the shrines shall be *devastated*" (Ezek. 6:6). As for the form of the verb, "you should know" that. **[H]** We find a midrash that the famine disappeared on account of Jacob; perhaps the last three years of the famine were not as bad as the first four. **[I]**

[H] It has the same form as the verb "you should know." **[I]** Jacob came to Egypt in the second year of the famine, and this occurred in "the second year" after that (OJPS, v. 18). So despite Jacob's presence, there were at least four years of severe famine.

NAHMANIDES **18 They came to him the next year**. If Rashi's comment to v. 19 is to be accepted, then this "second year" of the famine (OJPS) was actually the last year, and Joseph's interpretation of the dreams did not come true after all, which would bring his wisdom into question. (Genesis Rabbah says the famine finally resumed in Ezekiel's time.) Perhaps we can say that the famine in Canaan did align with Joseph's prediction. But in Egypt our Patriarch Jacob went down to the Nile, in full view of Pharaoh and all Egypt, and the Nile rose to his feet. So they knew that this was due to God's blessing. In this case, v. 12 would simply mean that Joseph supported his family both during the famine and as long as his father lived. Indeed, after Jacob's death Joseph reassures his brothers, "I will sustain you and your children" (50:21). But it still bothers me, for this would mean that the dream was not really true. They showed Pharaoh what was decreed but not what would actually happen. But I have seen in T. Sot. 10:9 that R. Yose said, "When Jacob died, the famine returned," implying that the five remaining years of famine did indeed take place. **[Z]** Ibn Ezra's suggestion that the last three years of the famine were not as bad as the first four is completely wrong. The dream made clear that all seven years were to be exactly equal. If the last three years were indeed different the text would have told us so. The straightforward sense of the text is that it took five years for the money to be used up. The money and livestock both could hardly have been used up all in a single year. The money—quite naturally—lasted for five years, but since nothing new happened during those five years the text is silent about them, saying nothing more than that "Joseph gathered in all the money" (v. 13) and so forth. Once the money was gone, we are told that they came to Joseph (in the sixth year) and that he gave them food in exchange for their livestock, not to satiety but just enough to keep them alive. (He did not give them the food all at once, but issued it throughout the year.) They then came back to him "the next year," the seventh year, and asked him to buy their land and themselves in exchange for the food he would give them during that year. Once the land became Pharaoh's, Joseph gave them seed so that the land should not "become a waste" (v. 19). For they knew that the seven years of the famine were ending, and that now sowing and reaping would once again resume. That is what is meant by "according to the want of their little ones" (v. 12, OJPS)—during the years of famine, Joseph gave them precisely as much as they needed.

19 Take us and our land in exchange for bread. They are telling him to buy them as slaves for Pharaoh, which he seems to confirm in v. 23, even though v. 20 only says that he bought the land. He in fact wanted only to buy the land, but he arranged that they should work the land in perpetuity, becoming families of sharecroppers for Pharaoh. See my comment to v. 23.

[Z] We omit Nahmanides' more extensive quotation making this point.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **18 The next year**. Literally "the second year" (OJPS) after Jacob's arrival, making it the fourth year of the famine (Hizkuni).

19 That we may live and not die, and that the land may not become a waste. Land with no one to live on it and cultivate it is as good as dead (Bekhor Shor).

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NJPS land passed over to Pharaoh. [21]And he removed the population town by town, from one end of Egypt's border to the other. [22]Only the land of the priests he did not take over, for the priests had an allotment from Pharaoh, and they lived off the allotment which Pharaoh had made to them; therefore they did not sell their land.

[23]Then Joseph said to the people, "Whereas I have this day acquired you and your land for Pharaoh, here is seed for you to sow the land. [24]And when harvest comes, you shall give one-fifth to Pharaoh, and four-fifths shall be yours as seed for the fields and as food for you and those in your households, and as nourishment for your children." [25]And they said, "You have saved our lives! We are grateful to my LORD, and we shall be serfs

לְפַרְעֹה׃ 21 וְאֶת־הָעָם הֶעֱבִיר אֹתוֹ
לֶעָרִים מִקְצֵה גְבוּל־מִצְרַיִם וְעַד־קָצֵהוּ׃
22 רַק אַדְמַת הַכֹּהֲנִים לֹא קָנָה כִּי׀ חֹק
לַכֹּהֲנִים מֵאֵת פַּרְעֹה וְאָכְלוּ אֶת־חֻקָּם
אֲשֶׁר נָתַן לָהֶם פַּרְעֹה עַל־כֵּן לֹא מָכְרוּ
אֶת־אַדְמָתָם׃
23 וַיֹּאמֶר יוֹסֵף אֶל־הָעָם הֵן קָנִיתִי אֶתְכֶם
הַיּוֹם וְאֶת־אַדְמַתְכֶם לְפַרְעֹה הֵא־לָכֶם
זֶרַע וּזְרַעְתֶּם אֶת־הָאֲדָמָה׃ 24 וְהָיָה
בַּתְּבוּאֹת וּנְתַתֶּם חֲמִישִׁית לְפַרְעֹה
וְאַרְבַּע הַיָּדֹת יִהְיֶה לָכֶם׀ לְזֶרַע הַשָּׂדֶה
וּלְאָכְלְכֶם וְלַאֲשֶׁר בְּבָתֵּיכֶם וְלֶאֱכֹל
לְטַפְּכֶם׃ 25 וַיֹּאמְרוּ הֶחֱיִתָנוּ נִמְצָא־חֵן
בְּעֵינֵי אֲדֹנִי וְהָיֵינוּ עֲבָדִים לְפַרְעֹה׃

RASHI **21 And he removed the population town by town.** So that they would understand they no longer had any connection to the land. He resettled the population of this city in a different city nearby. The text did not have to write this at all except in praise of Joseph, who was determined to remove from his brothers the stigma of being exiles. **From one end of Egypt's border to the other.** He did this to all the cities in the kingdom of Egypt, from one end of the country to the other.

22 The priests. This translation is correct; the word *kohen* always refers to someone who ministers to a god, except for a few occurrences when it refers to an official position, as in "priest of On" (41:45) and "priest of Midian" (Exod. 2:16). **For the priests had an allotment from Pharaoh.** An allotment of a certain amount of bread each day.

24 As seed for the fields. Each year. **And those in your households.** Your slaves.

25 We are grateful to my lord. Literally, may we "find favor in the sight of my lord" (OJPS) that you do for us what you have said. **And we shall be serfs to Pharaoh.** Obligated to give him this one-fifth every year.

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why is this whole story about "removing the population town by town" (v. 21) and so forth told here at all? It might belong in the Chronicles of Egypt, but what is it doing in God's holy Torah?

OJPS upon them; and the land became Pharaoh's. [21]And as for the people, he removed them city by city, from one end of the border of Egypt even to the other end thereof. [22]Only the land of the priests bought he not, for the priests had a portion from Pharaoh, and did eat their portion which Pharaoh gave them; wherefore they sold not their land.

[23]Then Joseph said unto the people: "Behold, I have bought you this day and your land for Pharaoh. Lo, here is seed for you, and ye shall sow the land. [24]And it shall come to pass at the ingatherings, that ye shall give a fifth unto Pharaoh, and four parts shall be your own, for seed of the field, and for your food, and for them of your households, and for food for your little ones." [25]And they said: "Thou hast saved our lives. Let us find favor in the sight of my lord, and we will be Pharaoh's

RASHBAM **21 And he removed the population town by town.** Just as Sennacherib did (see 2 Kings 18:32). The purpose was to make sure that they could not reestablish their title to the land after the sale by a claim of undisturbed possession.

IBN EZRA **21 And he removed the population.** He transferred everyone from their original places. But some think this refers only to the inhabitants of the capital, who were moved "to the [other] cities" (as the Hebrew literally says) so that they might work the land.

22 The priests. "Priests" is correct; see Onkelos.

KIMHI **21 And he removed the population town by town.** So that no one lived on his original holding. Each one was given a new holding that had previously belonged to someone else. That way, they would have to acknowledge that their holdings came to them from Pharaoh, and they would give him the one-fifth share every year.

24 And those in your households. The slaves and the livestock. **And as nourishment for your children.** Despite how much food children can chew through, Egypt is ordinarily quite fertile because of the Nile, not requiring rainfall. So four-fifths of the produce would be more than enough.

NAHMANIDES **22 Only the land of the priests he did not take over.** **[A]**

23 I have this day acquired you and your land for Pharaoh. Not as slaves, the way you requested, but to be his along with the land. Now that the land belongs to the king, it would be right for him to take four-fifths of the produce and you just one-fifth. But I am going to treat you kindly. I will let you take the owner's share and give the sharecropper's one-fifth to Pharaoh. But he has "acquired" you; you cannot leave the land. — That is what they swore to him in v. 19, when they asked that the land "not become a waste" in perpetuity.

25 We are grateful to my lord. For letting us take the four-fifths share so that we can live. **We shall be serfs to Pharaoh.** To work the land as we swore we would do.

[A] See Nahmanides' comment to "daughter of Poti-phera, priest of On" (41:45).

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **21 And he removed the population town by town.** Rather, "he brought them all into the cities" to sign over their property officially and publicly (Sforno).

22 Only the land of the priests he did not take over. Rather, the land of "the prominent men"—lest they turn their resentment against the king. And of course they are the ones who had him imprisoned, not killed; see my comment to 39:20 (Hizkuni).

24 You shall give one-fifth to Pharaoh. Which is what he has coming after he pays what he owes you (Sforno). **And four-fifths shall be yours as seed for the fields.** Which he, as owner of the field, is required to give you (Sforno).

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NJPS to Pharaoh." [26]And Joseph made it into a land law in Egypt, which is still valid, that a fifth should be Pharaoh's; only the land of the priests did not become Pharaoh's.

[27]Thus Israel settled in the country of Egypt, in the region of Goshen; they acquired holdings in it, and were fertile and increased greatly.

26 וַיָּשֶׂם אֹתָהּ יוֹסֵף לְחֹק עַד־הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה
עַל־אַדְמַת מִצְרַיִם לְפַרְעֹה לַחֲמֹשׁ רַק
אַדְמַת הַכֹּהֲנִים לְבַדָּם לֹא הָיְתָה
לְפַרְעֹה׃
27 וַיֵּשֶׁב יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם בְּאֶרֶץ גֹּשֶׁן
וַיֵּאָחֲזוּ בָהּ וַיִּפְרוּ וַיִּרְבּוּ מְאֹד׃

OJPS bondmen." [26]And Joseph made it a statute concerning the land of Egypt unto this day, that Pharaoh should have the fifth; only the land of the priests alone became not Pharaoh's.

[27]And Israel dwelt in the land of Egypt, in the land of Goshen; and they got them possessions therein, and were fruitful, and multiplied exceedingly.

RASHI **26 A land law.** "Law" in this verse is the same Hebrew word as "allotment" in v. 22; but the translations understand it correctly. This particular word implies a law that could never be repealed.

27 Thus Israel settled in the country of Egypt. And where in Egypt? **In the region of Goshen.** The Hebrew calls both of them "lands" (see OJPS). But indeed the region of Goshen was part of the land of Egypt.

IBN EZRA **27 They acquired holdings in it.** Literally, "they were held in it," meaning, of course, what the translations say.

KIMHI **27 Thus Israel settled in the country of Egypt.** That is, Israel the people, the Israelites. **They acquired holdings in it.** In addition to what Joseph had given them. **And increased greatly.** Both in numbers and in wealth.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **26 Joseph made it into a land law in Egypt, which is still valid, that a fifth should be Pharaoh's; only the land of the priests did not become Pharaoh's.** So it would not seem hard to the Israelites that the Holy One's own priests and Levites should be fed by their tithes, which were only half as much (Abarbanel). Once Joseph had demonstrated to them that this was reasonable and not a confiscatory tax, he established it as law (Sforno).

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VA-YEḤI

ויחי

NJPS [28]Jacob lived seventeen years in the land of Egypt, so that the span of Jacob's life came to one hundred and forty-seven years. [29]And when the time approached for Israel to die, he summoned his son Joseph and said to him, "Do me this favor, place your hand under my thigh as a pledge of your steadfast loyalty: please do not bury

[28] וַיִּחְיְ יַעֲקֹבׄ בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם שְׁבַע עֶשְׂרֵה
שָׁנָה וַיְהִיְ יְמֵי־יַעֲקֹבׄ שְׁנֵי חַיָּיו שֶׁבַע שָׁנִים
וְאַרְבָּעִים וּמְאַת שָׁנָה׃ [29] וַיִּקְרְבוּ יְמֵי־
יִשְׂרָאֵל לָמוּתׄ וַיִּקְרָא ׀ לִבְנוֹ לְיוֹסֵף וַיֹּאמֶר
לוֹ אִם־נָא מָצָאתִי חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ שִׂים־נָא
יָדְךָ תַּחַת יְרֵכִי וְעָשִׂיתָ עִמָּדִי חֶסֶד וֶאֱמֶת

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why tell us that "Jacob lived seventeen years in the land of Egypt" (v. 28)? V. 9 has already told us that he came to Egypt at age 130; his age at death, "one hundred and forty-seven years," would tell us how long he spent there. ✦ Why did he specifically summon "his son Joseph" (v. 29) to tell him, "Please do not bury me in Egypt"? He ought to have said this to all his sons, as indeed he does in 49:29. ✦ Having asked Joseph to "do me this favor," why does Jacob add "please"? ✦ Why did Jacob ask specifically not to be buried in Egypt, when it would have been enough to say, "When I lie down with my fathers, take me up from Egypt and bury me in their burial place"?

OJPS [28]And Jacob lived in the land of Egypt seventeen years; so the days of Jacob, the years of his life, were a hundred forty and seven years. [29]And the time drew near that Israel must die; and he called his son Joseph, and said unto him: "If now I have found favor in thy sight, put, I pray thee, thy hand under my thigh, and deal kindly and truly with me; bury me not, I pray

RASHI **28 Jacob lived seventeen years in the land of Egypt.** Why does this weekly portion begin in the middle of a paragraph? In the Hebrew text, at least, it is "blocked up," as the technical expression goes. The answer is that once our Patriarch Jacob passed away, the eyes and hearts of Israel were blocked up by the distress of the enslavement they began to undergo. Another reading: he intended to reveal the End of Days to his sons but was blocked from doing so (Genesis Rabbah).

29 When the time approached for Israel to die. Everyone of whom the text says that "the time approached for him to die" did not live as long as his ancestors. **He summoned his son Joseph.** Since he was the one who had the ability to take care of it. **Place your hand under my thigh.** Swear to me. **As a pledge of your steadfast loyalty.** More literally, "deal kindly and truly with me" (OJPS). Kindness done to the dead is true

RASHBAM **29 When the time approached for Israel to die.** Whenever someone is giving deathbed instructions to his children, the text explicitly mentions his nearness to death: "When Isaac was old and his eyes were too dim to see, he called his older son Esau and said to him . . . 'I am old now, and I do not know how soon I may die'" (27:1–2); "When David's life was drawing to a close, he instructed his son Solomon as follows" (1 Kings 2:1). Really this portion should begin with "Thus Israel

IBN EZRA **28 One hundred and forty-seven years.** Literally, "seven and forty and a hundred"; in 25:7, for Abraham, the numbers are given in reverse order, "one hundred and seventy and five." The text does not bother to standardize. **[A]**

29 Do me this favor. "Favor," since when Isaac and Ishmael buried Abraham, and when I and Esau buried Isaac, we did not have to go to such trouble. **Place your**

[A] This comment, like many in these final chapters, was recorded in London by Ibn Ezra's student Joseph b. Jacob of Morville.

KIMHI **28 Jacob lived seventeen years in the land of Egypt.** Just as Joseph lived in Jacob's care for 17 years, so Jacob lived in Joseph's care for 17 years.

29 And when the time approached for Israel to die. When he felt himself close to death, for exertion left him weak. He was afraid that he might die suddenly. **Steadfast loyalty.** The Hebrew is two separate nouns, which OJPS takes adverbially: "kindly and

NAHMANIDES **28 Jacob lived seventeen years in the land of Egypt.** I have already mentioned in my comment to 43:14 that the descent of Jacob to Egypt alludes to the third exile, which is our current exile at the hands of the "fourth beast" (Dan. 7:7)—that is, Rome. For the sons of Jacob caused their own descent to Egypt through the sale of their brother Joseph; but Jacob went down there because of the famine, thinking to save himself in the house of one who was friendly to his son. Pharaoh was in fact friendly to Joseph and was like a son to him. They all assumed they would go back up from there when the famine in Canaan was over, as they indeed said: "We have come to sojourn in this land, for there is no pasture for your servants' flocks, the famine being severe in the land of Canaan" (v. 4). But they did not in fact go back up. Instead, the exile grew long enough that Jacob died there and only his bones went back up. The elders and officers of Pharaoh brought them up themselves, providing Jacob with "a solemn mourning" (50:11). And that is precisely the case we are in with Rome and Edom. **[A]** Our brothers caused us to fall into their hands by making a treaty with the Romans. Agrippa, the last king of the Second Temple era, fled to them for aid, and the people of Jerusalem were starved into submission. Our exile has grown extraordinarily long, and we do not know when it will end (as we did with the two previous exiles). **[B]** Here in the exile we are like the dead, saying, "Our bones are dried up, our hope is gone; we are doomed" (Ezek. 37:11). But they will bring us up "out of all the nations . . . as an offering to the LORD" (Isa. 66:20) and will have "a solemn mourning" when they see us glorified. And we will see the Lord's retribution—for "He will raise us up, and we shall live before Him" (Hosea 6:2).

29 And when the time approached for Israel to die. That is, in the last year of his life. Though he was not ill, he knew that he did not have much longer to live, since he could feel his strength diminishing and his weakness increasing. So he summoned his son

[A] Edom = Christianity. **[B]** See 15:13 and Jer. 25:12.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **28 Jacob lived seventeen years in the land of Egypt.** Rashi explains that the Hebrew text at the beginning of our portion is "blocked up" because once Jacob passed away the Israelites began to undergo enslavement. True, Joseph was still ruling Egypt after Jacob died, but their enslavement must, in some small way, have already begun. Another explanation is that our passage continues the theme of Jacob's age already begun in v. 9. Note too that Jacob "lived" in Egypt for 17 years; his earlier years were so difficult that you could not really call them "living" (Hizkuni). His original intent had been to see Joseph and go right back to Canaan, until the Holy One informed him in 46:2–4 that this would not be the case, as indeed v. 27 has demonstrated. Now we are told explicitly how many years Jacob lived in Egypt (Abarbanel).

29 When the time approached for Israel to die. The Hebrew idiom occurs only twice elsewhere, once (in 1 Kings 2:1, with David) in our precise formulation, and once when the Lord tells Moses in Deut. 31:14, "The time is drawing near for you to die" (Masorah). We learn that one should not wait until one is actually ill before giving final instructions to one's children (Abarbanel). **He summoned his son Joseph.** For the Holy One had told him (in 46:4), "Joseph's hand shall close your eyes" (Hizkuni). **Place your hand under my**

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NJPS me in Egypt. 30When I lie down with my fathers, take me up from Egypt and bury me in their burial-place." He replied, "I will do as you have spoken." 31And he said, "Swear to me." And he swore to him. Then Israel bowed at the head of the bed.

OJPS thee, in Egypt. 30But when I sleep with my fathers, thou shalt carry me out of Egypt, and bury me in their burying-place." And he said: "I will do as thou hast said." 31And he said: "Swear unto me." And he swore unto him. And Israel bowed down upon the bed's head.

אַל־נָא תִקְבְּרֵנִי בְּמִצְרָיִם׃ 30 וְשָׁכַבְתִּי עִם־
אֲבֹתַי וּנְשָׂאתַנִי מִמִּצְרַיִם וּקְבַרְתַּנִי
בְּקִבְרָתָם וַיֹּאמַר אָנֹכִי אֶעֱשֶׂה כִּדְבָרֶךָ׃
31 וַיֹּאמֶר הִשָּׁבְעָה לִּי וַיִּשָּׁבַע לוֹ וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ
יִשְׂרָאֵל עַל־רֹאשׁ הַמִּטָּה׃ פ

RASHI kindness indeed, for one does it without expectation of reward. **Please do not bury me in Egypt.** For its soil will eventually be turned into vermin. **[A]** And those who die outside the land of Israel must go through the unpleasantness of rolling there underground before they come back to life. And I don't want the Egyptians to turn me into an idol and worship me.

30 When I lie down with my fathers. The translations understand correctly. He is not saying, as the Hebrew might be read, "I would lie down with my fathers, so take me up from Egypt and bury me in their burial place." "Lying down with one's fathers" is always used to refer to death, not to burial: "So David slept with his fathers," *after* which "he was buried in the City of David" (1 Kings 2:10).

31 Then Israel bowed. As the expression goes, "A fox in its hour—bow down to it." **[B] At the head of the bed.** Bending himself in the direction of the Shekhinah. It is from this that the Sages inferred, "The Shekhinah rests above the head of the sick." Another reading: He bowed "about the high level" of the bed because his "bed" was faultless, having produced no evil descendants. Even Joseph, who was a king and had moreover been a captive among gentiles, remained righteous.

[A] See Exod. 8:13. **[B]** There are times when even the lion must bow down to the fox.

RASHBAM settled in the country of Egypt" (v. 27), for v. 28 is a continuation of that verse. But the congregations did not want to conclude the previous reading with Pharaoh taking possession of the land of Egypt, so they added v. 27 to end it by mentioning Israel. **Place your hand under my thigh.** See my comment to 24:2.

31 Then Israel bowed at the head of the bed. He bowed to Joseph from his position at the head of the bed.

KIMHI truly." The "true" aspect is a reminder that he was obligated to bury his father; the "kind" aspect is the request that he take him from Egypt to Canaan in order to do so.

31 Then Israel bowed at the head of the bed. In acknowledgment and thanks to God for letting him see his son alive after having given up hope, and for Joseph's swearing to bury him with his ancestors. Notice that he bows "at the head of the bed," indicating that this was in honor of God.

IBN EZRA **hand under my thigh.** See my comment to 24:2. Note that in 1 Chron. 29:24 all the officials and the warriors, and the sons of King David as well, "placed their hand under" King Solomon. **Steadfast loyalty.** See my comment to 24:49.

30 When I lie down with my fathers. When "David slept with his fathers ... he was buried in the City of David" (1 Kings 2:10); and the Holy One told Moses, "You are soon to lie with your fathers" (Deut. 31:16), but he was buried "in the valley in the land of Moab, near Beth-peor" (34:6). Neither man's "fathers" were buried in those locations. The phrase is a euphemism for death. Or possibly these verses are to be read, "Please do not bury me in Egypt; I [wish to] lie down with my fathers." And how can that be achieved? **Take me up from Egypt and bury me in their burial-place.**

31 Swear to me. Jacob trusted Joseph's word but was afraid Pharaoh would not let him go. His insistence on being buried with his fathers was to strengthen the connection with the land of Israel, for most of the commandments depend on the land. **Israel bowed.** Out of respect for Joseph's high

NAHMANIDES Joseph. After Joseph returned to the capital, he did get sick (see 48:1). In just this way, "when David's life was drawing to a close" he told his son Solomon, "I am going the way of all the earth" (1 Kings 2:1–2). He could feel his life ebbing away.

31 "Swear to me." And he swore to him. It is not that Jacob had any suspicion that his righteous and beloved son might disregard his instructions, especially when he had given his promise. He had Joseph swear in order to make the matter seem more significant to Pharaoh. For Pharaoh might not give Joseph permission to leave him, saying, "Send your brothers and your servants and let them take him up there." Or Pharaoh might desire to bury the prophet in his own country for the sake of the honor and merit that would

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **thigh.** Subjugate yourself to being placed under my foot (Bekhor Shor). In ancient Israel, this gesture was the equivalent of our handshake (Hizkuni). Jacob may have meant to indicate that Joseph's own hands should bring him back to Canaan (Abarbanel). **Please do not bury me in Egypt.** For three reasons: (1) one is remembered where one is buried, and Jacob wished to be remembered where his descendants would live, in Canaan; (2) he did not want to associate with the Egyptians even after death, given how wicked their culture already was; (3) by his efforts to be in Canaan even after his death, he wanted to emphasize how worthwhile it is to try one's best to stay there while one is alive (Gersonides). Rather, "do not bury me *now* in Egypt. Once I lie down with my fathers"—that is, when I die—"I want to be taken out of Egypt immediately." On burial in general, see further my comments to 23:19 (Abarbanel). Not even in a coffin. If you bury me there for even an hour, they will say, "That's enough!" and will not let you bring me to the cave. For burial in a coffin is their normal custom (Sforno).

30 When I lie down with my fathers, take me up from Egypt and bury me in their burial-place. A possible implication is that Jacob was buried in Egypt before being "taken up" and reburied (Hizkuni). "Since you are the one who brought me down here, it is only right that you bring me back up after my death." But I think there is something else going on: Jacob was afraid that Joseph wanted his bones to remain in Egypt to ensure that his own remains would eventually be taken back to Canaan together with Jacob's (Abarbanel). "Lying down with one's fathers" refers to the funeral, where the coffin is set down amid the mourners for the eulogy. You will find that all the kings in the book of Kings, righteous and wicked, "lie with their fathers" in this way. "Once I have lain in state in this way, they will dismiss me from their minds and you will be able to take me up from Egypt" (Sforno). **I will do as you have spoken.** Rather, "For my part, I will do as you have spoken"—as far as is in my power. But there is a beautiful midrash on these words: "I too will do as you have spoken; when my time comes to die, I will instruct them to take me up from Egypt to Canaan" (Abarbanel).

31 Swear to me. We see from this that "place your hand under my thigh" is not the equivalent of swearing but, as I explained, of subjugation (Bekhor Shor). **Then Israel bowed at the head of the bed.** He was certainly bowing toward the Shekhinah; nonetheless, this is the fulfillment of the sun bowing down to Joseph in 37:9 (Hizkuni).

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NJPS 48 Some time afterward, Joseph was told, "Your father is ill." So he took with him his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. [2]When Jacob was told, "Your son Joseph has come to see you," Israel summoned his strength and sat up in bed.

[3]And Jacob said to Joseph, "El Shaddai appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan, and He blessed me, [4]and said to me, 'I will make you fertile and numerous, making of you a community of peoples; and I will assign this land to your offspring

OJPS 48 And it came to pass after these things, that one said to Joseph: "Behold, thy father is sick." And he took with him his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. [2]And one told Jacob, and said: "Behold, thy son Joseph cometh unto thee." And Israel strengthened himself, and sat upon the bed.

[3]And Jacob said unto Joseph: "God Almighty appeared unto me at Luz in the land of Canaan, and blessed me, [4]and said unto me: Behold, I will make thee fruitful, and multiply thee, and I will make of thee a company of peoples; and will give this

מח וַיְהִי אַחֲרֵי הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה וַיֹּאמֶר לְיוֹסֵף הִנֵּה אָבִיךָ חֹלֶה וַיִּקַּח אֶת־שְׁנֵי בָנָיו עִמּוֹ אֶת־מְנַשֶּׁה וְאֶת־אֶפְרָיִם׃ 2 וַיַּגֶּד לְיַעֲקֹב וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּה בִנְךָ יוֹסֵף בָּא אֵלֶיךָ וַיִּתְחַזֵּק יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיֵּשֶׁב עַל־הַמִּטָּה׃ 3 וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב אֶל־יוֹסֵף אֵל שַׁדַּי נִרְאָה־אֵלַי בְּלוּז בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן וַיְבָרֶךְ אֹתִי׃ 4 וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלַי הִנְנִי מַפְרְךָ וְהִרְבִּיתִךָ וּנְתַתִּיךָ לִקְהַל עַמִּים וְנָתַתִּי אֶת־הָאָרֶץ

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why did Jacob tell Joseph, "El Shaddai appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan" (v. 3), but not mention any of the other times the Holy One appeared to him? ✦ Why did Jacob call the Holy One "El Shaddai"? ✦ Why did Jacob add "He blessed me" when he is about to list the blessings?

RASHI **48:1 Joseph was told.** By someone; the text does not bother to tell us who. Some say that Ephraim studied regularly with Jacob, and that when Jacob became ill in Goshen, Ephraim went to his father in the capital and told him. **So he took with him his two sons.** So that Jacob could bless them before he died.

2 When Jacob was told. Again, by someone unidentified. Many biblical verses are terse in this way. **Israel summoned his strength.** He thought, "Even though he is my son, he is a king, too, and I must give him honor." From here we learn that one ought in fact give honor to a king. Moses gave honor to a king: "Then all these courtiers of yours shall come down to me and bow low to me" (Exod. 11:8); **[C]** and so did Elijah: "Elijah . . . tied up his skirts and ran in front of Ahab all the way to Jezreel" (1 Kings 18:46).

4 Making of you a community of peoples. I have been informed that "a community and peoples" are yet to come forth from me. Even though God told me, "A nation, yea an assembly of nations shall descend from you" (35:11)—"a nation" referring to Benjamin

[C] Rather than saying that Pharaoh himself would come. See Rashi's comment there.

KIMHI **48:1 Joseph was told.** Presumably by one of his brothers.

2 When Jacob was told. Before Joseph arrived. **Your son Joseph has come to see you.** Rather, Joseph "is coming" to see you (compare OJPS).

NAHMANIDES accrue to the Egyptians thereby. So Jacob made Joseph swear. For it would not be right to make Joseph violate an actual oath. And Joseph himself would feel obligated all the more to take pains in this matter because of his oath. And Jacob achieved his purpose, when Pharaoh said, "Go up and bury your father, as he made you promise on oath" (50:6).

RASHBAM **48:1 Joseph was told.** Literally, "[some]one said to Joseph" (OJPS); the same applies "when Jacob was told" in v. 2.

2 And sat up in bed. That is, he "sat upon the bed" (OJPS) with his feet on the floor. That is how Joseph could "remove them from his knees" in v. 12. It shows us how strong Jacob was. He spoke all the words of these next two chapters sitting up, with his feet on the ground, until he had finished everything he had to say. Only then did he "draw his feet into the bed" (49:33).

3 El Shaddai appeared to me at Luz. When I returned from Paddan-aram: "I am El Shaddai. Be fertile and increase" (35:11).

IBN EZRA office. But I think he was offering praise to the Holy One. This is different from the case of Abraham, of whom we are told explicitly, "Abraham bowed low *to the people of the land, the Hittites*" (23:7).

48:1 Joseph was told. Literally, "one [unidentified person] said to Joseph" (OJPS). Compare "Jochebed daughter of Levi, who was born to Levi in Egypt" (Num. 26:59), where the Hebrew is literally, "whom one [unidentified woman] bore to Levi in Egypt." **So he took with him his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim.** He had other sons but took only these two, the oldest.

2 Jacob was told. Here too "one [unidentified person] told Jacob" (OJPS), perhaps even the same person who told Joseph his father was ill, though that may have been a messenger particularly sent to Joseph to inform him. **Israel summoned his strength and sat up in bed.** He had been lying down because of his illness.

4 I will make you fertile. According to Saadia, Jacob is saying in this passage that, despite these words, he had no further children; in fact, Rachel died. But now, says Jacob, I know that by these words the Holy One meant *your* children; thus far Saadia. But I can't swallow this explanation. **[B]** What difference would there be between Joseph's children and Reuben's? And anyway Benjamin was born to him after this prophecy was given. What I think Jacob means is this: The Holy One told me that Canaan would be the eternal

[B] In a later comment recorded by Joseph of Morville, Ibn Ezra does accept this explanation.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **48:1 Some time afterward, Joseph was told, "Your father is ill."** From Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer we learn the following: Since the day the world was created, no one had ever survived a sneeze. Wherever he was—on the road or in the market—his soul would simply depart, until this moment, when Jacob begged for mercy: "Master of the Universe! Please do not take my soul until I have had time to instruct my children and grandchildren." And his wish was granted. From then on, everyone who sneezes has been obligated to thank God for being restored from death to life. As Job 41:10 tells us, "His sneezings flash lightning" (Hizkuni). "Some time afterward" means "shortly afterward" (Abarbanel).

2 Israel summoned his strength. He wanted to appear healthy. For one who is dangerously ill can retract his gift if he recovers, but a healthy man cannot renege on such a gift (Hizkuni).

4 I will make you fertile and numerous, making of you a community of peoples. These three separate expressions—fertile, numerous, community—must refer to the "offspring" who are mentioned immediately afterward: Benjamin and your two sons. Since "fertile" is *maphrekha*, I know that refers to Ephraim (Abarbanel).

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NJPS to come for an everlasting possession.' [5]Now, your two sons, who were born to you in the land of Egypt before I came to you in Egypt, shall be mine; Ephraim and Manasseh shall be mine no less than Reuben and Simeon. [6]But progeny born to you after them shall be yours; they shall be recorded instead of their brothers in their

OJPS land to thy seed after thee for an everlasting possession. [5]And now thy two sons, who were born unto thee in the land of Egypt before I came unto thee into Egypt, are mine; Ephraim and Manasseh, even as Reuben and Simeon, shall be mine. [6]And thy issue, that thou begettest after them, shall be thine; they shall be called after the name of their brethren in their

הַזֹּאת לְזַרְעֲךָ אַחֲרֶיךָ אֻחֻזַּת עוֹלָם׃ [5] וְעַתָּה שְׁנֵי־בָנֶיךָ הַנּוֹלָדִים לְךָ בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם עַד־בֹּאִי אֵלֶיךָ מִצְרַיְמָה לִי־הֵם אֶפְרַיִם וּמְנַשֶּׁה כִּרְאוּבֵן וְשִׁמְעוֹן יִהְיוּ־לִי׃ [6] וּמוֹלַדְתְּךָ אֲשֶׁר־הוֹלַדְתָּ אַחֲרֵיהֶם לְךָ יִהְיוּ עַל שֵׁם אֲחֵיהֶם יִקָּרְאוּ בְּנַחֲלָתָם׃

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ What is the nature of the gift that Jacob gives Joseph by telling him that "Ephraim and Manasseh shall be mine no less than Reuben and Simeon" (v. 5), thereby including them among the tribes? ✦ How could Jacob tell Joseph that "your two sons" were intended to be part of the divine promise, rather than the sons of one of his other sons? This was not Jacob's decision to make! ✦ Conversely, why does he tell Joseph, "Progeny born to you after them shall be yours" (v. 6)? Wouldn't it make more sense to exclude Ephraim and Manasseh and include those of Joseph's progeny who would be born after Jacob arrived (though he did not have any)?

RASHI and "an assembly of nations" implying two more—I had no sons after I had Benjamin. But He taught me that one of my tribes would split into two. And now I am giving that gift to you.

5 Your two sons, who were born to you in the land of Egypt before I came to you. That is, they were born between the time you parted from me and the time I came to you. **Shall be mine.** They are to be counted among the rest of my sons and take their appropriate share in the land.

6 But progeny born to you after them shall be yours. If you have any more children, they shall not be counted among my sons but shall be included in the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh. They will not be considered tribes of their own. Even though the land is to be distributed proportionately—

RASHBAM **5 Now, your two sons, who were born to you in the land of Egypt before I came to you in Egypt, shall be mine; Ephraim and Manasseh shall be mine no less than Reuben and Simeon.** Since the Holy One has assigned the land of Canaan to me, I am entitled to make you my first-born and give you a double portion. So your two sons will each get portions, just like Reuben and Simeon. — As for Jacob's saying they were born "before I came to you in Egypt," remember that they were born "before the years of famine came" (41:50).

6 Progeny. Sons and grandsons born to you since I arrived, at any point during the 17 years I have been here. **They shall be recorded instead of their brothers.** They will not be tribes, but clans. For the 70 souls who were in existence when Jacob came down to Egypt all became founders of clans, whether sons or grandsons, and shared in the land. Note Num. 26:21 and 26:40, where even those of Jacob's great-grandsons who were among the 70 are mentioned as the

KIMHI **6 Progeny born to you after them.** More precisely, "progeny that *were* born to you after them." None are mentioned in the text, but they might have been too young at this point for Joseph to bring them. Onkelos and various commentators take it to mean "progeny that *will have been* born to you after them" (compare OJPS), but none such are

IBN EZRA possession of my offspring, and I am giving you the double inheritance of the first-born in that land. So let Ephraim and Manasseh take their portions of the land just like Reuben or Simeon, my own two oldest. Thus "[Reuben's] birthright was given to the sons of Joseph" (1 Chron. 5:1).

6 But progeny born to you after them shall be yours. The explanation that "progeny" here refers to the children of Machir, who were "born upon Joseph's knees," does not strike me as correct. What would "after the name of their brothers" (see my next comment) mean, in that case? **They shall be recorded instead of their brothers in their inheritance.** Rather, "after the name of their brothers" (compare OJPS). Whatever children you have after

NAHMANIDES **48:6 But progeny born to you after them shall be yours.** Rashi's comment cannot be correct. If it were, that would mean that Joseph's first-born status would be honorary only, in that tribes would be named after his two sons. But our verse refers to "their *inheritance*." B. BB 123a states clearly that Joseph was to inherit twice as much as any of the other brothers. We learn from this, moreover, that the land was *not* divided proportionately by person; if it had been, how would the first-born get anything extra? But we cannot say that each descendant of Joseph got twice as much as the members of any of the other tribes; the text says nothing whatsoever about this. Nor do we find that Jacob gives Joseph the birthright. He simply says that Ephraim and Manasseh are his no less than Reuben and Simeon. That is what is meant by saying that "his birthright was given to the sons of Joseph son of Israel" (1 Chron. 5:1). They were to be two separate tribes, as is confirmed by every reference to the matter in rabbinic literature. It is simply not the case, as Rashi thinks, that the land was divided proportionately. It was divided into 12 equal-sized areas. The tiny tribe of Simeon got one, just as did the much more populous tribe of Judah. No less than Reuben and Simeon, Ephraim and Manasseh also each got one: "These shall be the boundaries of the land that you shall allot to the twelve tribes of Israel. Joseph shall receive two portions" (Ezek. 47:13). As for the expression cited by Rashi, "with larger groups increase the share, with smaller groups reduce the share" (Num. 26:54), that applies to the ancestral houses listed in that chapter. Each tribe would divide its portion into smaller portions to be distributed among the ancestral houses that came forth from Egypt, larger ones getting more and smaller ones less. Joseph was indeed the first-born with regard to inheriting the land. According to the Talmud, his two sons were both treated as tribes, just like Reuben and Simeon; if we take Num. 26:54 to apply to individuals, then we must assume that each individual from those tribes received twice as much land as individuals from the other tribes. But for Joseph to receive the same as

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **5 Ephraim and Manasseh shall be mine no less than Reuben and Simeon.** Meaning the sons of Rachel would control almost a third of the land east of the river, two and a half tribes out of nine and a half (Bekhor Shor). This way Rachel would at least have one more tribe than the two maidservants (Hizkuni). It is possible that Jacob thought the land would be divided equally between the tribes and did not realize that, as Num. 26:54 tells us, the land was to be allocated proportionately. There are many things that prophets do not know; see 2 Kings 4:27, where Elisha says, "the LORD has hidden it from me." And of course Jacob himself was unaware of the sale of Joseph. As for the comparison with Reuben and Simeon, we find in Numbers 26 that they amounted to only 65,930, while Ephraim and Manasseh totaled 85,200, almost a third again as many (Gersonides).

6 They shall be recorded instead of their brothers in their inheritance. So you will have just two tribes, Ephraim and Manasseh, not a third for your other sons (Abarbanel).

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NJPS inheritance. 7I [do this because], when I was returning from Paddan, Rachel died, to my sorrow, while I was journeying in the land of Canaan, when still some distance short of Ephrath; and I buried her there on the road to Ephrath"—now Bethlehem.

OJPS inheritance. 7And as for me, when I came from Paddan, Rachel died unto me in the land of Canaan in the way, when there was still some way to come unto Ephrath; and I buried her there in the way to Ephrath—the same is Beth-lehem."

7 וַאֲנִי | בְּבֹאִי מִפַּדָּן מֵתָה עָלַי רָחֵל בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנַעַן בַּדֶּרֶךְ בְּעוֹד כִּבְרַת־אֶרֶץ לָבֹא אֶפְרָתָה וָאֶקְבְּרֶהָ שָּׁם בְּדֶרֶךְ אֶפְרָת הִוא בֵּית לָחֶם׃

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ If Jacob is telling Joseph that he buried Rachel "on the road to Ephrath" (v. 7) to apologize for not burying her in the cave of Machpelah, why didn't he say so in ch. 47, when he commanded Joseph to bury him there?

RASHI "With larger groups increase the share, with smaller groups reduce the share" (Num. 26:54)—and each individual (except for the first-born) will receive the same amount, even so none but these shall be called "tribes."

7 When I was returning from Paddan. I am putting you to the trouble of bringing me back to bury me in Canaan even though I did not do the same for your mother, though she died near Bethlehem. **Some distance.** The Hebrew word, *kivrah*, refers to a particular measure of distance, the 2,000 cubits of the Sabbath limit, **[D]** according to Moses ha-Darshan. "You cannot say that bad weather prevented me from taking her and burying her in Hebron; it was the dry season, when the earth is as full of holes as a sieve (*kevarah*) and the water drains well." Onkelos translates "a day's distance" (the distance one can plow in a day) and I think that is in fact what the name of this measurement means; we have a comparable measurement here in France. **I buried her there.** I did not even carry her as far as Bethlehem in order to bring her into the land. **[E]** And I know that you hold it against me. But you should know that I buried her there by the command of heaven, so she could help her children when Nebuzaradan exiles

[D] See Exod. 16:29 and the comments there. **[E]** Though this verse and 35:6 both seem to say that Rachel died in Canaan, the beginning and end of Rashi's comment here indicate his opinion that she did not quite make it.

KIMHI mentioned either. We do not find any sons listed for Joseph anywhere other than Ephraim and Manasseh.

7 I buried her there on the road to Ephrath. He was traveling "slowly, at the pace of the cattle" (33:14), and could not just leave them and take her to Bethlehem—let alone to the cave in Hebron—for "the flocks and herds, which are nursing, are a care to me" (33:13). Had he simply carried her along, she might have started to decay (for perhaps it was summer). He had no way to embalm her, as there were no physicians with him.

NAHMANIDES the other tribes and for his first-born status to consist solely of having two tribes instead of one like the other brothers—that is completely impossible.

7 And I buried her there. Rashi has Jacob saying, "I did not even carry her as far as Bethlehem in order to bring her into the land." I have no idea what this can mean. Was Rachel, God forbid, buried outside the land? She died in the land and was buried there, as Jacob says plainly. Moreover, Rachel dies in 35:19, and 35:6 has already established that they are in the land of Canaan. **On the road.** As for what Rashi says about "Rachel weeping for her children," there must be some allusion to this in the text, and this must be it: She was buried "on the road" that her children would one day take on their way into exile. For Rachel did not really die on the road, but in Ramah of Benjamin, and she was buried there. The text does not make these allusions to the future explicit. But the straightforward sense is that Jacob is excusing himself so Joseph will not get angry at being asked to bury *him* in the cave of Machpelah when Jacob himself did not take the trouble to bury *her* there. She, at least, died in the land of Canaan and was buried there, not outside the land as Jacob would be if he were buried in Egypt.

[C] Rachel died suddenly, in the road, and he simply could not bury her in the cave of Machpelah. Though the cave was no more than half a day's journey away, the sheer numbers of Jacob's household and his livestock meant that it would have taken him many days to travel there. Indeed, it did take many days until "Jacob came to his father Isaac at Mamre, at Kiriath-arba—now Hebron" (35:27). As the Sages point out in M. MK 3:8, the bier of a woman is never set down in the open road (which would not be respectable). But I do think Jacob was making an excuse. Joseph certainly knew where his mother died and was buried, and that she was treated with respect in

[C] Though our texts do not say so, the rest of this comment must have been written after Nahmanides traveled to Israel and saw where Rachel's Tomb is actually located. See his comment to 35:16.

RASHBAM founders of clans. The end of that section tells us explicitly, "Among these shall the land be apportioned as shares . . . the allotment shall be made according to the listings of their ancestral tribes" (Num. 26:53,55). And see B. BB 118b–119a. Joseph's own grandsons born after Jacob arrived are also listed in Numbers 26 among those who would get a share in the land; see vv. 29–37.

7 When I was returning from Paddan. On that same journey, after the Holy One blessed me. **Rachel died.** On that same journey, when we were still a long way from any settlement. So **I buried her there on the road to Ephrath.** I did not have the opportunity to bury her next to Leah in the cave of Machpelah. — He had to tell Joseph this so Joseph would not blame him for treating his mother this way.

IBN EZRA Ephraim and Manasseh shall be recorded along with them and inherit with them. We do not find Joseph having any other children than Ephraim and Manasseh, but so what? He might have had some who were not mentioned because they were going to inherit along with Ephraim and Manasseh and so they did not need to be mentioned. There are many such cases.

7 I buried her there on the road to Ephrath. For she died suddenly, and I could not bring her to bury her in the cave where I subsequently buried Leah. So do not be angry that I am asking you to give me an honor that I did not give your mother.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **7 When I was returning from Paddan.** And had not yet established my claim to the cave, which Esau was contesting. By the time I buried Leah, Esau had already gone to his own country and left everything to me (Hizkuni). **Some distance short.** The Hebrew expression occurs also only in 35:16 and 2 Kings 5:19 (Masorah). **I buried her there on the road to Ephrath.** Out of respect for her, in territory that I knew would eventually belong to one of her sons [apparently in the territory of Benjamin]. If I had buried her in the cave, she would have been in the territory of Leah's son, Judah. — In fact we find many great men buried in their own tribal territories, among them Joshua, Joseph himself, and Aaron's son Eleazar (Bekhor Shor). Rachel's tomb is certainly in the territory of Benjamin, for we read in 1 Sam. 10:2, "When you leave me today, you will meet two men near the tomb of Rachel in the territory of Benjamin." In any case, a woman who dies in childbirth cannot be moved a long distance for burial, as her blood would soil her shroud (Hizkuni). "You deserve an extra tribe in compensation for the insult I gave you by treating your mother this way." But I think Ephrath here is another hint that Ephraim should outrank Manasseh. Jacob also foresaw, by means of the Holy Spirit, that

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NJPS [8]Noticing Joseph's sons, Israel asked, "Who are these?" [9]And Joseph said to his father, "They are my sons, whom God has given me here." "Bring them up to me," he said, "that I may bless them." [10]Now Israel's eyes were dim with age; he could not see. So [Joseph] brought them close to him, and he kissed them and embraced them. [11]And Israel said to Joseph, "I never expected to see you again, and here God has let me see your children as well."

[12]Joseph then removed them from his knees, and bowed low with his face to the

OJPS [8]And Israel beheld Joseph's sons, and said: "Who are these?" [9]And Joseph said unto his father: "They are my sons, whom God hath given me here." And he said: "Bring them, I pray thee, unto me, and I will bless them." [10]Now the eyes of Israel were dim for age, so that he could not see. And he brought them near unto him; and he kissed them, and embraced them. [11]And Israel said unto Joseph: "I had not thought to see thy face; and, lo, God hath let me see thy seed also."

[12]And Joseph brought them out from between his knees; and he fell down on his

[8] וַיַּרְא יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־בְּנֵי יוֹסֵף וַיֹּאמֶר מִי־
אֵלֶּה׃ [9] וַיֹּאמֶר יוֹסֵף אֶל־אָבִיו בָּנַי הֵם
אֲשֶׁר־נָתַן־לִי אֱלֹהִים בָּזֶה וַיֹּאמֶר קָחֶם־
נָא אֵלַי וַאֲבָרְכֵם׃ [10] וְעֵינֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל כָּבְדוּ ✦ פתוחה
מִזֹּקֶן לֹא יוּכַל לִרְאוֹת וַיַּגֶּשׁ אֹתָם אֵלָיו
וַיִּשַּׁק לָהֶם וַיְחַבֵּק לָהֶם׃ [11] וַיֹּאמֶר יִשְׂרָאֵל
אֶל־יוֹסֵף רְאֹה פָנֶיךָ לֹא פִלָּלְתִּי וְהִנֵּה
הֶרְאָה אֹתִי אֱלֹהִים גַּם אֶת־זַרְעֶךָ׃
[12] וַיּוֹצֵא יוֹסֵף אֹתָם מֵעִם בִּרְכָּיו וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why must Joseph once again identify Ephraim and Manasseh as "my sons, whom God has given me here" (v. 9)? ✦ Why does Joseph "bow low with his face to the ground" (v. 12)?

RASHI them. They will have to pass that spot, and Rachel will come forth from her grave and weep and beg mercy for them: "A cry is heard in Ramah—wailing, bitter weeping—Rachel weeping for her children" (Jer. 31:15).

8 Noticing Joseph's sons. He intended to bless them, but the Shekhinah departed from him, for Jeroboam and Ahab would descend from Ephraim, and Jehu and his sons from Manasseh. **[F] Who are these?** Where have these come from? They do not appear to deserve blessing.

9 They are my sons, whom God has given me here. Literally not "here" but "with this." He showed Jacob his certificate of betrothal and his marriage contract, begged God for mercy, and the Holy Spirit rested on Jacob again. **Bring them up to me that I may bless them.** This explains Hosea 11:3, "I *tirgalti* Ephraim, taking them in his arms." I returned My spirit to its habitual (*ragil*) place with Jacob for Ephraim's sake, so he would take them in his arms.

11 I never expected to see you again. My mind never filled with the thought that I would see your face any more. — The unusual Hebrew verb refers to thought; see the noun form in "Give advice, offer *counsel*" (Isa. 16:3).

12 Joseph then removed them from his knees. After Jacob kissed them (v. 10), Joseph took them off his knees so he could arrange them, one on the right and one on the

[F] All these are kings of the breakaway northern kingdom; see 1 Kings 11–14, 1 Kings 16–22, and 2 Kings 9–10.

KIMHI **11 I never expected to see you again.** I really thought you were dead.

12 Joseph then removed them from his knees. That is, from "between his knees" (OJPS), "from near" him, as this preposition is used in "near Beer-lahai-roi" (25:11); "Jonathan rose from the table" (1 Sam. 20:34). He removed them from between Jacob's

NAHMANIDES death. Jacob's reason for not bringing her to be buried in the cave was that he did not want to be buried there with two sisters. He would have been embarrassed in the presence of his ancestors. And Leah was the wife to whom he was married first, and permissibly. He married Rachel because he loved her, and because he had vowed to do so.

9 Whom God has given me. By doing such miracles for me that the king himself gave me the wife who bore these sons to me. **Here.** Joseph did not need to tell his father that his sons had been born "here" in Egypt; after all, when he left him he had neither a wife nor sons. And Jacob himself had said that they had been born in Egypt. It seems to me that "here" must be taken literally: "my sons, whom God has given me in this" situation that you have described, that is, the sons who were born "before I came to you in Egypt" (v. 5)—these are the boys who you said were yours. Esther uses the same expression: "*in this way* the girl would go to the king" (Esther 2:13).

RASHBAM **8 Noticing Joseph's sons.** Literally, he "saw" them, though v. 10 will tell us that he could not see. It is possible to see well enough to realize that there is a person there but not well enough to recognize who the person is. This is how Micaiah could "see the LORD seated upon His throne" (1 Kings 22:19), though "man may not see Me and live" (Exod. 33:20).

9 Here. In this country.

11 I never expected to see you again. I could never reason out a way that I might see you. (Note that "to see" here is the infinitive absolute rather than the infinitive construct; compare 50:20.) Such mental reasoning is also the correct translation of our verb in Ps. 106:30, where NJPS has "Phinehas stepped forth and *intervened*." When he "took a spear in his hand" (Num. 25:7), he was taking *calculated* revenge.

IBN EZRA **9 Bring them up to me.** Bring them "now" (as this Hebrew particle always means).

10 He could not see. But v. 8 has just told us that he "saw" Joseph's sons (see the Hebrew)! Our verse means that he could not see well enough to recognize them.

11 I never expected to see you again. The verb denotes mental reflection: "in our enemies' own *estimation*" (Deut. 32:31; see my comment there for the correct understanding of that verse in its context).

12 Joseph then removed them from his knees. That is, from Jacob's knees; this

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS Levi would be separated from the other tribes to serve in the sanctuary, necessitating that another tribe be added to make up the total of 12. See my commentary to Joshua for an in-depth discussion of this matter (Abarbanel). My burdens, physical and emotional, so overcame me that I did not even have the strength to bring her to the Bethlehem cemetery. From that moment on, my heart has been empty inside me. I no longer have sexual desire nor the strength to father children (Sforno).

8 Who are these? As I said in my comment to v. 5, a prophet should not be expected to know everything (Gersonides).

9 Whom God has given me here. More literally: "whom God has given me in this" situation in which God has promised to make you "a community of peoples." For another case where "in this" does not mean "in this place," see 1 Sam. 16:8 (Gersonides).

10 So [Joseph] brought them close to him. Because Jacob could not see them very well from a distance (Gersonides).

11 I never expected to see you again. Rather, "I never *prayed* to see you again"; compare Ps. 106:30, where "Phinehas stepped forth and *prayed*" (Hizkuni). It is forbidden to pray for something that has happened not to have happened (Abarbanel).

12 Joseph then removed them from his knees. He was afraid they were too heavy a burden; he did not want to tire out his father

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NJPS ground. [13]Joseph took the two of them, Ephraim with his right hand—to Israel's left—and Manasseh with his left hand—to Israel's right—and brought them close to him. [14]But Israel stretched out his right hand and laid it on Ephraim's head, though he was the younger, and his left hand on Manasseh's head—thus crossing his hands—although Manasseh was the first-born. [15]And he blessed Joseph, saying,

"The God in whose ways my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked,

The God who has been my shepherd from my birth to this day—

לְאַפָּיו אָרְצָה׃ 13 וַיִּקַּח יוֹסֵף אֶת־שְׁנֵיהֶם
אֶת־אֶפְרַיִם בִּימִינוֹ מִשְׂמְאל יִשְׂרָאֵל
וְאֶת־מְנַשֶּׁה בִּשְׂמֹאלוֹ מִימִין יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיַּגֶּשׁ
אֵלָיו׃ 14 וַיִּשְׁלַח יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־יְמִינוֹ וַיָּשֶׁת
עַל־רֹאשׁ אֶפְרַיִם וְהוּא הַצָּעִיר וְאֶת־
שְׂמֹאלוֹ עַל־רֹאשׁ מְנַשֶּׁה שִׂכֵּל אֶת־יָדָיו
כִּי מְנַשֶּׁה הַבְּכוֹר׃ 15 וַיְבָרֶךְ אֶת־יוֹסֵף
וַיֹּאמַר
הָאֱלֹהִים אֲשֶׁר הִתְהַלְּכוּ אֲבֹתַי לְפָנָיו
אַבְרָהָם וְיִצְחָק
הָאֱלֹהִים הָרֹעֶה אֹתִי מֵעוֹדִי עַד־הַיּוֹם
הַזֶּה׃

OJPS face to the earth. [13]And Joseph took them both, Ephraim in his right hand toward Israel's left hand, and Manasseh in his left hand toward Israel's right hand, and brought them near unto him. [14]And Israel stretched out his right hand, and laid it upon Ephraim's head, who was the younger, and his left hand upon Manasseh's head, guiding his hands wittingly; for Manasseh was the first-born. [15]And he blessed Joseph, and said:

"The God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk,

the God who hath been my shepherd all my life long unto this day,

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why does Joseph bring the boys "close to" Jacob a second time (v. 13) after having already "brought them close" in v. 10? ✦ Why are we told that Jacob "blessed Joseph" (v. 15) when he is really blessing the boys? ✦ Why does Jacob invoke "the God in whose ways my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked," "the God who has been my shepherd from my birth to this day" (v. 15), *and* "the Angel who has redeemed me from all harm" (v. 16)?

RASHI left, in such a way that Jacob could put his hands on them and bless them. **And bowed low with his face to the ground.** When he went back to his place in front of his father.

13 Ephraim with his right hand—to Israel's left. When two people are facing each other, one person's right is the other person's left. Joseph intended his first-born to receive the right-handed blessing.

14 Thus crossing his hands. Rather, as Onkelos and OJPS translate, "guiding his hands wittingly." He did this deliberately and with great wisdom. He knew perfectly well that Manasseh was the first-born but deliberately did not put his right hand on him.

RASHBAM **13 Ephraim with his right hand.** To position him at Israel's left.

14 Thus crossing his hands. Compare the word *sakal* for a man who is mixed up. **Although Manasseh was the first-born.** Jacob knew perfectly well that Joseph had placed them so that his right hand would be on Manasseh and his left hand on Ephraim. But he wanted his right hand on the head of the younger and his left hand on the head of the first-born.

15 And he blessed Joseph. For blessing the sons amounts to blessing their father.

KIMHI knees once he had kissed and embraced them. For Joseph had not presented them to Jacob in any particular order, but he now wanted to put them in the proper order for blessing.

14 Crossing his hands. Rather, "guiding his hands wittingly" (OJPS), using wisdom. Had he put his right hand on the head of Manasseh, the first-born, no "wisdom" would have been necessary; that was the normal way of doing things.

15 The God in whose ways my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked. We have already explained (see our comment to 17:1) that this expression means serving God in

IBN EZRA verse really belongs after v. 20. Jacob was sitting on the bed, and Joseph took the boys off his lap after he blessed them.

13 Joseph took the two of them. Rather, he "had taken" them. I have already shown you numerous examples of this kind.

14 Thus crossing his hands. Rather, "guiding his hands wittingly" (OJPS), as if his hands themselves were wise enough to know what he wished to do. **Although Manasseh was the first-born.** NJPS is correct to translate *ki* as "although" here; it is not "for" (OJPS) but the opposite. See (e.g.) "*even though* this is a stiffnecked people" (Exod. 34:9); there are many others of the kind.

NAHMANIDES **15 And he blessed Joseph, saying.** For he was blessing Joseph's sons because of his love for Joseph. This tells us that Joseph did not in fact have any other sons. All his blessing would consist of the blessing of these two sons. Or perhaps he is blessing Joseph by saying that the rest of Joseph's sons would be blessed through the blessing of these two. That is what I think. For the prophet does say, "Progeny born to you after them shall be yours" (v. 6), and those words cannot have been said in vain. But (as Onkelos tells us) Joseph's other sons had not yet been born; the past tense verb in v. 6 is a prophetic perfect, as in v. 22 and many other examples. The straightforward sense of v. 6 would certainly seem to be that Joseph already had other sons; otherwise Jacob would not have had to specify what he meant in vv. 5–6 at such length. Remember that we are told Joseph had two sons "before the years of famine came" (41:50); others were born afterward to whom the text makes no reference because they do not figure in the story. **The God in whose ways my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked.** The prophet invokes the God who in His greatness and might performed great and awesome deeds for his ancestors. **The God who has been my shepherd.** He is here invoking the God of Truth, so it is perhaps not "who has been my shepherd" but "my friend"

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS (Abarbanel). **And bowed low with his face to the ground.** To take his leave of his father. The text continues by explaining how Jacob had blessed them (Bekhor Shor).

13 And brought them close to him. Not to put them back on Jacob's knees, but to stand near him (Abarbanel).

14 Israel stretched out his right hand and laid it on Ephraim's head. To declare him a tribe. This is the source of the practice of dubbing someone a knight (Hizkuni). It is clear that Joseph had not penetrated his father's allusions to the priority of Ephraim (Abarbanel). **Thus crossing his hands.** Rather, "guiding his hands wittingly" (OJPS). He might have simply had the boys switch places, but he was wise enough not to embarrass Manasseh in this way (Hizkuni). Rather, "mixing up his hands." The verb is spelled with a ש, but it really has the meaning of the homonym spelled with ס. Alternatively, it is Joseph who "crossed [Jacob's] hands" by arranging the boys as he did (Gersonides). Unable to see clearly, he let his hands be his guide in finding their heads (Sforno).

15 And he blessed Joseph. For this, he needed neither to see him nor to embrace or kiss him. But the text does not tell us the contents of this blessing (Sforno). **From my birth to this day.** The numerical value of "my birth" in Hebrew is 130, the number of years

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NJPS 16The Angel who has redeemed me from all harm—
Bless the lads.
In them may my name be recalled,
And the names of my fathers Abraham and Isaac,
And may they be teeming multitudes upon the earth."
17When Joseph saw that his father was placing his right hand on Ephraim's head, he thought it wrong; so he took hold of his father's hand to move it from Ephraim's

OJPS 16the angel who hath redeemed me from all evil,
bless the lads;
and let my name be named in them,
and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac;
and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth."
17And when Joseph saw that his father was laying his right hand upon the head of Ephraim, it displeased him, and he held up his father's hand, to remove it from

16 הַמַּלְאָךְ֙ הַגֹּאֵ֣ל אֹתִ֔י מִכָּל־רָ֖ע
יְבָרֵ֣ךְ ׀ אֶת־הַנְּעָרִ֑ים
וְיִקָּרֵ֤א בָהֶם֙ שְׁמִ֔י
וְשֵׁ֖ם אֲבֹתַ֣י אַבְרָהָ֣ם וְיִצְחָ֑ק
וְיִדְגּ֥וּ לָרֹ֖ב בְּקֶ֥רֶב הָאָֽרֶץ׃ שלישי
17 וַיַּ֤רְא יוֹסֵף֙ כִּֽי־יָשִׁ֣ית אָבִ֔יו יַ֖ד־יְמִינ֣וֹ
עַל־רֹ֣אשׁ אֶפְרַ֑יִם וַיֵּ֣רַע בְּעֵינָ֔יו וַיִּתְמֹ֗ךְ
יַד־אָבִ֛יו לְהָסִ֥יר אֹתָ֖הּ מֵעַ֣ל רֹאשׁ־אֶפְרַ֑יִם

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why does he ask that God and the Angel "bless the lads" using a singular verb? Shouldn't "God and the Angel" require a plural? ✦ What does Jacob mean by "In them may my name be recalled, and the names of my fathers Abraham and Isaac"? Ephraim and Manasseh are not named after any of them, so how was this fulfilled? ✦ Why did Joseph "take hold of his father's hand to move it from Ephraim's head to Manasseh's" (v. 17)? Shouldn't he have done this *before* Jacob gave them his blessing?

RASHI **16 The Angel who has redeemed me from all harm**. The angel who is sent to me whenever I am in trouble, as when "in the dream an angel of God said to me" (31:11); "I am the God of Beth-el" (31:13). **Bless the lads**. Manasseh and Ephraim. **And may they be teeming multitudes**. Literally, "may they be like fish," who are fertile and increase without the evil eye having any power over them.

17 He took hold of his father's hand. Literally, he "supported" his father's hand in his own, having lifted it off his son's head.

KIMHI thought and deed, for the root of divine service is in the mind—the "heart," as Biblical Hebrew expresses it. Rather than praise himself for walking in God's ways, Jacob invokes the merit of his ancestors. **The God who has been my shepherd from my birth to this day**. For himself he claims no credit, but merely offers thanks.

16 The Angel who has redeemed me from all harm. For "the angel of the LORD camps around those who fear Him and rescues them" (Ps. 34:8). God's actions on earth are performed for Him by intermediaries. **In them may my name be recalled**. For the future nation of Israel would be called by the names of Joseph and Ephraim **[A]**: "Perhaps the LORD, the God of Hosts, will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph" (Amos 5:15); "Give ear, O shepherd of Israel who leads Joseph like a flock! Appear, You who are enthroned on the cherubim, at the head of Ephraim . . . and Manasseh!" (Ps. 80:2–3).

17 When Joseph saw. It is not clear whether this occurred before Jacob blessed them or after he had already started giving them that first blessing.

[A] It is not clear why Kimhi omits Manasseh here. Note that in the quotation from Psalm 80 he omits the name of Benjamin, which comes between Ephraim and Manasseh there.

RASHBAM **16 In them may my name be recalled**. For their offspring and the offspring of their offspring will live on. **And may they be teeming multitudes**. This is a ל״ה verb; the *dagesh* in the ג is a *dagesh lene*.

17 When Joseph saw that his father was placing his right hand on Ephraim's head. Joseph saw before he blessed them that his hands were crossed. **To move it from Ephraim's head to Manasseh's**. Literally, "to *re*move it" (OJPS) from Ephraim's head so he could place it on Manasseh's head. This verb always means to remove oneself or something else *from* one place to another, though it is regularly used without mentioning that aspect: "they *turned* his way" (19:3), that is, they left the place they were in order to move to where he was; "*Come in*, my lord, *come in* here, do not be

IBN EZRA **16 The Angel who has redeemed me from all harm**. For more on this angel, see Exod. 23:20. He is "the God who has been my shepherd" (v. 15) and so forth. **In them may my name be recalled**. Indeed, Israel as a whole can be called "Ephraim" or "Joseph." And of course when Rachel, Joseph's mother and Ephraim's grandmother, is "weeping for her children" (Jer. 31:15), she is weeping for all Israel. She is the one whom Jacob thought of as his wife: "the sons of Jacob's wife Rachel" (46:19). It was not until after Rachel had borne Joseph that Jacob said to Laban, "Give me leave to go back to my own homeland" (30:25). And of course Jacob gave Joseph the status of first-born, which in Jacob's mind he was. Once it turned out that Reuben was not worthy of first-born status, it belonged to Joseph, who was the other son who was the "first issue of the womb" (Num. 18:15). (Dan and Gad, who were sons of Leah's and Rachel's maidservants, do not come into consideration here.)

17 His right hand. The right hand is more respectable than the left, and more powerful.

NAHMANIDES (see Prov. 27:1 for this use of the word). It is through Truth that the Holy One expresses peace and friendship. **The Angel who has redeemed me from all harm**. This is the one who answered him whenever he was in distress: "I am the God of Beth-el" (31:13). This is the angel of whom it is said, "My Name is in him" (Exod. 23:21)—which is why v. 16 says "in the midst of the earth" (see OJPS). All this will be obvious to the enlightened. **From my birth to this day**. There is no contradiction here to what I explained in my comment to 46:1. Jacob was led on the True path from the day of his birth, but because he spent so much time outside the land, he was not united with the aspect of Truth until he returned to the land of his ancestors. And of course he was forced to interact with Laban in a crooked way, which is not the way of Truth.

16 In them may my name be recalled. Ibn Ezra's comment is incorrect; our verse says "them," not "him." Israel was not called by the name of Manasseh. (But perhaps he meant by this "the House of Joseph" of Josh. 17:17.) Jacob means that Joseph's "seed and name shall endure" (Isa. 66:22), and that the names of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob would always be associated with them.

17 He thought it wrong. Perhaps Joseph was upset because he loved Manasseh, his first-born, more. But in my opinion he simply thought his father had mixed them up. Had he blessed them by mistake, they would have received no blessing, since it would not have

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS during which Jacob was provided for by the Holy One before his arrival in Egypt; "this" is 17, the number of years he lived in Egypt (Abarbanel).

16 The Angel who has redeemed me from all harm. The Active Intellect; see parts 4 and 6 of my *Book of the Wars of the LORD* (Gersonides). **Teeming multitudes.** The reason this verb is derived from fish is obvious—a single fish may have an absolutely astounding number of eggs (Gersonides).

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NJPS head to Manasseh's. 18"Not so, Father," Joseph said to his father, "for the other is the first-born; place your right hand on his head." 19But his father objected, saying, "I know, my son, I know. He too shall become a people, and he too shall be great. Yet his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his offspring shall be plentiful enough for nations." 20So he blessed them that day, saying, "By you shall Israel invoke blessings, saying: God make you like Ephraim and Manasseh." Thus he put Ephraim before Manasseh.

עַל־רֹ֥אשׁ מְנַשֶּׁ֖ה׃ 18 וַיֹּ֥אמֶר יוֹסֵ֖ף אֶל־אָבִ֑יו
לֹא־כֵ֣ן אָבִ֔י כִּי־זֶ֥ה הַבְּכֹ֖ר שִׂ֣ים יְמִינְךָ֑
עַל־רֹאשֽׁוֹ׃ 19 וַיְמָאֵ֣ן אָבִ֔יו וַיֹּ֖אמֶר יָדַ֣עְתִּי
בְנִ֗י יָדַ֙עְתִּי֙ גַּם־ה֣וּא יִֽהְיֶה־לְּעָ֔ם וְגַם־ה֥וּא
יִגְדָּ֖ל וְאוּלָ֣ם אָחִ֣יו הַקָּטֹ֔ן יִגְדַּ֥ל מִמֶּ֖נּוּ וְזַרְעוֹ֙
יִֽהְיֶ֣ה מְלֹא־הַגּוֹיִ֔ם׃ 20 וַיְבָרְכֵ֖ם בַּיּ֣וֹם הַה֑וּא
לֵאמֹ֗ר בְּךָ֤ יְבָרֵךְ֙ יִשְׂרָאֵ֣ל לֵאמֹ֔ר יְשִׂמְךָ֖
אֱלֹהִ֑ים כְּאֶפְרַ֥יִם וְכִמְנַשֶּׁ֖ה וַיָּ֥שֶׂם אֶת־
אֶפְרַ֖יִם לִפְנֵ֥י מְנַשֶּֽׁה׃

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Having already blessed Ephraim and Manasseh, why does Jacob bless them a second time in v. 20? ✦ If that was indeed a different blessing, why was it not included in the first blessing?

RASHI **19 I know, my son, I know.** That he is the first-born. **He too shall become a people, and he too shall be great.** For Gideon will descend from him, through whom the Holy One will work a miracle. **[G] Yet his younger brother shall be greater than he.** For Joshua, who will distribute the land and teach Torah to Israel, will descend from him. **And his offspring shall be plentiful enough for nations.** The whole world will be "filled" (as the Hebrew more literally says) with Joshua's fame, and his name, when he says, "Stand still, O sun, at Gibeon, O moon, in the Valley of Aijalon!" (Josh. 10:12).

20 By you shall Israel invoke blessings. When they bless their children. They will give them *your* blessing, and say to them, **God make you like Ephraim and Manasseh. Thus he put Ephraim.** In his blessing. **Before Manasseh.** So that Ephraim would precede Manasseh in the military arrangements of Numbers 2 and the inauguration of the Tabernacle in Numbers 7.

[G] See Judges 7.

KIMHI **19 And he too shall be great.** When they left Egypt the tribe of Ephraim was larger than that of Manasseh, but by the time they entered the land Manasseh was larger. **[B]** So it cannot mean "he shall grow," as the verb might literally be translated. It must refer to greatness, as the translations have it. And indeed Joshua, who delivered Israel, was from Ephraim; prophecy and (once the kingdom was divided) even kingship were found in Ephraim. The first northern king was "Jeroboam son of Nebat, an Ephraimite of Zeredah" (1 Kings 11:26). At the dedication of the Tabernacle, the chieftain of the Ephraimites brought his offering "on the seventh day" (Num. 7:48) and the chieftain of the Manassites only "on the eighth" (Num. 7:54). And Manasseh was part of "the division of Ephraim" (Num. 2:24). As we said, all Israel was called by the name Ephraim: "Ephraim shall not envy Judah" (Isa. 11:13). Even the numerical discrepancy can possibly be explained.

20 So he blessed them that day. A second time. **God make you like Ephraim and Manasseh.** "You" is singular, but Manasseh is stuck in there too. **Thus he put Ephraim before Manasseh.** In this invocation as well.

[B] See Num. 2:18–21 and 26:29–37.

NAHMANIDES been given properly, through the Holy Spirit. Once Jacob told him, "I know, my son, I know" (v. 19), it was fine with Joseph.

20 So he blessed them that day. That very day—not wanting, despite Joseph's urging, to move his right hand from Ephraim's head to Manasseh's and thereby put Manasseh first. **By you shall Israel invoke blessings.** "You," Joseph, in the singular: By your offspring shall Israel invoke blessings. **God make you like Ephraim and Manasseh.** He put Ephraim first explicitly. **Thus he put Ephraim before Manasseh.** In all his blessings.

OJPS Ephraim's head unto Manasseh's head. 18And Joseph said unto his father: "Not so, my father, for this is the first-born; put thy right hand upon his head." 19And his father refused, and said: "I know it, my son, I know it; he also shall become a people, and he also shall be great; howbeit his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his seed shall become a multitude of nations." 20And he blessed them that day, saying: "By thee shall Israel bless, saying: God make thee as Ephraim and as Manasseh." And he set Ephraim before Manasseh.

RASHBAM afraid" (Judg. 4:18), that is, leave that place and come to where I am.

18 Not so, Father. Do not understand that Joseph is telling his father, "You are not doing it right," and think that he ought to have asked him, "Why are you doing it this way?" He is saying, "The birth of the boys is not so, not as you think it is. You seem to think I was not careful enough to bring the boys to you so that your right hand could be on the head of the first-born and your left hand on the head of the younger, but that my right hand was on the head of the first-born and my left hand on the head of the younger boy. But that is not what I did. I brought the first-born to your right hand and the younger brother to your left."

19 I know, my son, I know. I know that you are wise enough to position the boys with regard to *my* hands, thinking that I wished to put my right hand on the head of the first-born. But I want my hand on the head of the younger, who is on *your* right.

20 By you shall Israel invoke blessings. Every Israelite shall bless his children. **Thus he put Ephraim before Manasseh.** By saying, "God make you like Ephraim and Manasseh." One can indeed "put" something in words; see "These are the rules that you shall *set* before them" (Exod. 21:1); "This is the Teaching that Moses *set* before the Israelites" (Deut. 4:44); "write down this poem and teach it to the people of Israel; *put* it in their mouths" (Deut. 31:19).

IBN EZRA **19 His offspring shall be plentiful enough for nations.** Literally, they shall be "the fullness of the nations," meaning that many nations would issue from him.

20 By you shall Israel invoke blessings. All the Israelites, not Jacob-Israel. **Thus he put Ephraim before Manasseh.** In the words of the blessing.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **19 I know, my son, I know.** "I know that I have put Ephraim first, and I know why I am nonetheless blessing them equally." But our Sages interpret as follows: "I know what your brothers did to you, and I know you think Manasseh will be as jealous of Ephraim as your brothers were of you" (Abarbanel).

20 God make you like Ephraim and Manasseh. Equally; there will be no jealousy or contention between them (Abarbanel). **Thus he put Ephraim before Manasseh.** And indeed Joshua and most of the kings of Israel came from Ephraim (Bekhor Shor).

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NJPS 21Then Israel said to Joseph, "I am about to die; but God will be with you and bring you back to the land of your fathers. 22And now, I assign to you one portion more than to your brothers, which I wrested from the Amorites with my sword and bow."

OJPS 21And Israel said unto Joseph: "Behold, I die; but God will be with you, and bring you back unto the land of your fathers. 22Moreover I have given to thee one portion above thy brethren, which I took out of the hand of the Amorite with my sword and with my bow."

21 וַיֹּ֤אמֶר יִשְׂרָאֵל֙ אֶל־יוֹסֵ֔ף הִנֵּ֥ה אָנֹכִ֖י מֵ֑ת
וְהָיָ֤ה אֱלֹהִים֙ עִמָּכֶ֔ם וְהֵשִׁ֥יב אֶתְכֶ֖ם אֶל־
אֶ֥רֶץ אֲבֹתֵיכֶֽם׃ 22 וַאֲנִ֞י נָתַ֤תִּי לְךָ֙ שְׁכֶ֣ם
אַחַ֔ד עַל־אַחֶ֖יךָ אֲשֶׁ֣ר לָקַ֑חְתִּי מִיַּ֤ד הָאֱמֹרִי֙
בְּחַרְבִּ֖י וּבְקַשְׁתִּֽי׃ פ

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ What was the "one portion more than to your brothers" (v. 22) that Joseph was assigned? Was it the city of Shechem, which is in fact the word used here for "portion"? ✦ But if the "one portion more" refers to the double portion of the first-born, why does Jacob say that he "wrested [it] from the Amorites with my sword and bow"?

RASHI **22 And now, I assign to you.** Since you are taking the trouble to see to my burial, I am also giving you a portion that you can be buried in—Shechem: "The bones of Joseph, which the Israelites had brought up from Egypt, were buried at Shechem" (Josh. 24:32). **One portion more than to your brothers.** Literally, "one Shechem." That shall be the extra portion that you get. **Which I wrested from the Amorites.** From Esau, who was acting like an Amorite. Another reading: not "which I wrested from the Amorites," but "which I wrested from *imrei*"—Esau, who trapped his father with *the sayings of* his mouth. **With my sword and bow.** When Simeon and Levi killed the men of Shechem, all the neighboring peoples united against them, and Jacob strapped on his weapons to confront them. Another reading: "One portion more" is that of the first-born. Joseph's sons should each

KIMHI **22 Which I wrested from the Amorites.** Rather, "which I—that is, my descendants—shall wrest from the Amorites." It is a prophetic perfect. **With my sword and bow.** As Joshua tells the Israelites, the Amorites were driven out "not by your sword or by your bow" (Josh. 24:12); they were driven out by Jacob's—that is, with God's help.

NAHMANIDES **22 I assign to you one portion more than to your brothers.** Having blessed Joseph's sons and made them into two tribes, he told Joseph that God would be with them in exile, to rescue them in times of trouble. They would be fertile and increase greatly, and He would return them to the land of their ancestors so they could take possession of it. "But I," says Jacob, "have already assigned to you the one part of the land that is in my power to give, and that is the portion of the first-born." All this was to placate Joseph, whom he loved. Joseph, through his sons, was blessed from this hour to be two tribes, not one. And this would apply as well to the standards of the Israelite camp and the dedication of the Tabernacle. **[D]** "So I have done you all the good it is in my power to do." To give Joseph any more than this one portion of the first-born would be stealing from the other brothers. But he could give the first-born portion to anyone he wanted to, and he chose to give it to Joseph. The portion that Jacob has now assigned him would come into his possession once the Israelites conquered the land, by warfare "with sword and bow." **Which I wrested from the Amorites.** The Israelites began their conquest by taking land from the Amorites, for Sihon and Og were "two Amorite kings" (Deut. 3:8). The first great battle in the conquest was fought (with them) by a descendant of Joseph: Joshua. And a great miracle occurred in that battle "when the LORD routed the Amorites before the Israelites" (Josh. 10:12). And the territory taken from them went to descendants of Joseph, when "the descendants of Machir son of Manasseh went to Gilead and captured it, dispossessing the Amorites who were there" (Num. 32:39). The Ephraimites too took possession of Amorite territory: "The Amorites also persisted in dwelling in Har-heres, in Aijalon, and in Shaalbim. But the hand of the House of Joseph bore heavily on them and they had to perform forced labor" (Judg. 1:35). **[E]** **With my sword and bow.** They would not be able to conquer the land without these: "Apart from the Hivites who dwelt in Gibeon, not a single city made terms with the Israelites; all were taken in battle. For it was the LORD's doing to stiffen their hearts to give battle to Israel, in order that they might be proscribed" (Josh. 11:19–20). The sword and bow are Jacob's because it was through his merit that they won, as if it were he who fought for them and not they themselves: "It was not by their sword that they took the land, their arm did not give them victory, but Your right hand, Your arm, and Your goodwill, for You favored them" (Ps. 44:4). That verse alludes to the merits of the Patriarchs, for according to the Way of Truth, "Your right hand" refers to Abraham, "Your arm" to Isaac, and "Your goodwill" to Jacob. It also

[D] See Numbers 2 and Numbers 7, respectively. **[E]** As he hints in his comment to v. 16, Nahmanides must understand "the House of Joseph" to include both Ephraim and Manasseh.

RASHBAM **21 I am about to die.** And I know that after my death **God will be with you and bring you back to the land of your fathers.** After the "four hundred years" (15:13) of which Abraham was told.

22 I assign to you one portion. Of that land. **More than to your brothers.** Since "Ephraim and Manasseh shall be mine no less than Reuben and Simeon" (v. 5), you thereby get two portions in the land that I and my descendants will eventually get **from the Amorites with my sword and bow** in the war that Joshua will fight. — Even though the Holy One told them they had gotten their land "not by your sword or by your bow" (Josh. 24:12), that verse is speaking about the two Amorite kings on

IBN EZRA **22 One portion.** Literally, one *shechem*, hinting (some think) at the city by that name, which of course itself actually belonged to the descendants of Joseph. But "portion" is the correct translation, in my opinion; it is metaphoric, derived from what one can carry on one's "shoulder," which is the literal meaning of the word (see, e.g., Exod. 12:34). For another metaphoric meaning, see Zeph. 3:9. **More than to your brothers.** Literally, "one portion *over* your brothers" (compare OJPS); NJPS understands the idiom correctly. **Which I wrested from the Amorites with my sword and bow.** Jacob's "sword and bow" was the Holy One. David said something similar, calling God "My shield, my mighty champion" (2 Sam. 22:3, Ps. 18:3). Jacob refers here to the land that Israel (the nation) would "wrest" from the Amorites, mentioned specifically here because no other of the seven nations of Canaan **[C]** was stronger than they. Notice that even after the two great

[C] See Deut. 7:1.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **22 I assign to you one portion more than to your brothers.** One *shechem* more, alluding to the city of Shechem, where Joseph would be buried (Abarbanel). **Which I wrested from the Amorites with my sword and bow.** Since no text can be disconnected from its straightforward sense, Jacob must certainly have done this, though we are not told how (Bekhor Shor). Literally, "which I took" (OJPS), the Hebrew idiom for "which I purchased"—"the parcel of land he purchased from the children of Hamor, Shechem's father, for a hundred kesitahs" (33:19), just as Abraham purchased the cave of Machpelah. Unlike Simeon and Levi, Jacob's "sword and bow" were the wealth he acquired by means of the sheep and cattle he raised (Abarbanel). With my skill and my intelligence, which are the "sword and bow" of the righteous (Sforno).

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NJPS 49 And Jacob called his sons and said, "Come together that I may tell you what is to befall you in days to come.

2Assemble and hearken, O sons of Jacob;

Hearken to Israel your father:

OJPS 49 And Jacob called unto his sons, and said: "Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you that which shall befall you in the end of days.

2Assemble yourselves, and hear, ye sons of Jacob;

and hearken unto Israel your father.

רביעי

מט וַיִּקְרָא יַעֲקֹב אֶל־בָּנָיו וַיֹּאמֶר
הֵאָסְפוּ וְאַגִּידָה לָכֶם אֵת אֲשֶׁר־יִקְרָא
אֶתְכֶם בְּאַחֲרִית הַיָּמִים׃
2 הִקָּבְצוּ וְשִׁמְעוּ בְּנֵי יַעֲקֹב
וְשִׁמְעוּ אֶל־יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲבִיכֶם׃

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why does Jacob tell his sons to "come together" (v. 1) and again to "assemble and hearken" (v. 2)? ✦ If he is simply repeating, why does the second command, "Hearken to Israel your father," not match "that I may tell you what is to befall you in days to come" of v. 1? ✦ What in fact is the purpose of this chapter: to bless them and pray for them? To reproach them? To tell them what would happen to their offspring? To tell them that they would take possession of the chosen land?

RASHI take a share. There are many other examples where the word *shechem* means "portion." **[H]** Another reading: "my sword and bow" are his wisdom and his prayer.

49:1 That I may tell you what is to befall you in days to come. He tried to let them know when "the end of days" (OJPS) would occur, but the Shekhinah departed from him and he began to speak of other things.

2 Assemble and hearken, O sons of Jacob. Jacob did not rebuke his sons until he was on the point of death. He told Reuben, "Son, I will tell you why I have not rebuked you all these years—so that you would not leave me and attach yourself to my brother, Esau."

[H] Rashi cites Hosea 6:9, Zeph. 3:9, and Ps. 21:13 and 60:8, but it is not clear that *shechem* means "portion" in them or anywhere else.

RASHBAM the *east* bank of the Jordan. As our Sages tell us, the plague of hornets mentioned in that verse did not cross the Jordan. **[A]** West of the river, it was Jacob's merit (his "sword and bow") that achieved this for them.

49:1 Jacob called his sons. He sent for them. **Come together.** The 70 souls must have already grown into a great nation during the 17 years, since "in the fourth generation" (15:16) **[B]** they would amount to 600,000. **What is to befall you.** With regard to their might and their inheritance.

[A] See Rashi's comment to Exod. 23:28. **[B]** Our manuscript of Rashbam's commentary said "in the words of our Sages"; the editor of the manuscript suggested this was a mistaken expansion of בד"ר, originally intended to mean "in the fourth generation."

KIMHI **49:1 What is to befall you.** "Befall" (normally קרה) is spelled like "summon" here (קרא). For other examples, see Isa. 51:19 and Jer. 13:22. But our expression really means "*some of* what is to befall you." The particle *et* most often has this meaning. He is telling them only a small portion of what would happen. **In days to come.** More literally, "in after days." But "after" can of course mean "shortly after" or "long after." Here he is talking about the time when they would enter the land to take possession of it and telling them, via the spirit of prophecy, something of what would befall them. Some of this refers to their allocation of the land and some to their success in war.

2 Assemble and hearken. This is the beginning of the prophecy, like Moses' "Give ear, O heavens" (Deut. 32:1) and Deborah's "Hear, O kings!" (Judg. 5:3).

IBN EZRA Amorite kings, Sihon and Og, were killed, Joshua can still say, "Ah, Lord GOD! Why did You lead this people across the Jordan only to deliver us into the hands of the Amorites, to be destroyed by them?" (Josh. 7:7). Do not, by the way, be surprised at Jacob's saying, "which *I* wrested." Once the Holy One had promised it to Abraham, they considered it as good as theirs. And of course Jacob himself was promised, "The ground on which you are lying I will assign to you and to your offspring" (28:13).

NAHMANIDES seems plausible to me that Jacob did as the prophets would later do, holding out a drawn sword against the land of the Amorites and shooting arrows at it to symbolically conquer it for his descendants. Elisha did just this with King Joash of Israel: "Elisha put his hands over the king's hands . . . and said, 'Shoot!' and he shot" (2 Kings 13:16–17). The text does not tell us that Jacob did this, but our phrase hints at it. That may be why Jacob says that he has already "wrested" it from the Amorites, since it already as good as belonged to his descendants from that moment.

49:1 What is to befall you. He is prophesying about the future. Those who say that they are blessings (based on v. 28; see my comment there) are mistaken. Where exactly are the "blessings" for Reuben, Simeon, and Levi?

49:1 In days to come. Messianic times, to which Jacob alludes with these words (see v. 10). Our Sages say he wished to reveal the end of the exile to them, at which point the Shekhinah departed from him. For everyone agrees that the "days to come" described here are the days of the Messiah.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **49:1 And Jacob called his sons.** After he had privately blessed Joseph's two sons; he did not want to cause jealousy among them (Abarbanel). **What is to befall you in days to come.** More precisely, "in *the* days to come." He told them: The exact time has already been identified, since the Holy One told my grandfather Abraham in 15:13 that He had fixed the time at 400 years (Hizkuni). Everyone wants to know the future; Jacob thought this promise would draw in those of his sons who might be afraid he would chastise them. As Nahmanides points out, everyone agrees that the "days to come" described here are the days of the Messiah; how could they not be? But the straightforward sense of the phrase is simply "the far future." Knowing by his power of prophecy how greatly his descendants were to increase, his essential purpose was to make sure to appoint one of them to be the leader, king, or ruler, so the choice would not lead to quarreling among them (Abarbanel). As when Balaam (in Num. 24:14) and the prophets (e.g., Mic. 4:1) use this phrase, he is really talking about "the end of days" (OJPS) for the other nations (Sforno).

2 Assemble and hearken, O sons of Jacob. Since you are my sons, you need not fear that I will chastise you too harshly. And all of you can assemble—which was not the case for the sons of Abraham or Isaac (Abarbanel). **Hearken to Israel your father.** Hearken to me both because I am Israel, who has "striven with beings divine and human" (32:29), and because I am your father; hearken, too, because my words will demand interpretation (Abarbanel).

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NJPS [3]Reuben, you are my first-born,
My might and first fruit of my vigor,
Exceeding in rank
And exceeding in honor.
[4]Unstable as water, you shall excel no longer;
For when you mounted your father's bed,
You brought disgrace—my couch he mounted!

OJPS [3]Reuben, thou art my first-born,
my might, and the first-fruits of my strength;
the excellency of dignity,
and the excellency of power.
[4]Unstable as water, have not thou the excellency;
because thou wentest up to thy father's bed;
then defiledst thou it—he went up to my couch.

3 רְאוּבֵן בְּכֹרִי אַתָּה
כֹּחִי וְרֵאשִׁית אוֹנִי
יֶתֶר שְׂאֵת
וְיֶתֶר עָז׃
4 פַּחַז כַּמַּיִם אַל־תּוֹתַר
כִּי עָלִיתָ מִשְׁכְּבֵי אָבִיךָ
אָז חִלַּלְתָּ יְצוּעִי עָלָה׃ פ

RASHI **3 First fruit of my vigor.** The very first drop he produced—since he had never had a nocturnal emission. The word translated "vigor" means essentially the same thing as the previous word, "might" or "strength," as you can see from the way it is used in the following verses: "His great *might* and vast power" (Isa. 40:26); "I have gotten *power*!" (Hosea 12:9). **Exceeding in rank.** You ought to have exceeded your brothers, more literally, in "lifting [your hands]"—in the Priestly Blessing. **And exceeding in honor.** Rather, in "power" (OJPS)—for you ought to have exceeded them in kingship as well: "He will give *power* to His king" (1 Sam. 2:10). And what caused you to lose them both? . . .

4 Unstable as water. Your instability (as the vowels and the accent make clear, this is a segholate noun, not an adjective), the precipitousness with which you rushed to show your anger, **[I]** like rushing waters. So **you shall excel no longer.** You shall not take all these extras that ought to have been yours. **For when you mounted your father's bed.** That was the instability you displayed. **You brought disgrace—my couch he mounted!** Rather, "you brought disgrace [on the One] who mounted my couch"—the Shekhinah,

[I] See Rashi's comment to "Reuben went and lay with Bilhah" (35:22).

KIMHI **3 My might and first fruit of my vigor.** These expressions repeat "my first-born" a second and then a third time. For Reuben (as Onkelos points out) was entitled to three distinctions: the priesthood, the right of the first-born, and the kingship. **Exceeding in rank.** This refers to the first-born status and to the priesthood, both of which are matters of rank. (The Sages, however, read this to say not "rank" but literally "lifting"—a biblical idiom for forgiveness of sin. This was Jacob's blessing for him: that he be given enough forgiveness to outweigh his transgression.) **And exceeding in honor.** Rather, in "power" (OJPS), which is necessary for kingship. Reuben would have exceeded in these three ways had he not committed his great sin.

4 Unstable as water. As light and swift as running water, you rushed to fulfill your desire. Lust overcame you and you did not stand up to it. You did not stop to consider what a terrible transgression this was. **You shall excel no longer.** More precisely, "you shall not exceed." You will not, after all, get more than your brothers. **My couch he mounted!** And I could no longer be with Bilhah.

NAHMANIDES **3 Exceeding in rank and exceeding in honor.** This verse is correctly understood as follows: "Reuben, you were my first-born [and so forth] when *I* was "exceeding in rank and exceeding in power." For "power," see "He will give *power* to His king" (1 Sam. 2:10).

4 Unstable as water, you shall excel no longer. The first Hebrew word is in fact a noun denoting impulsiveness, used frequently in rabbinic literature; it may be a metathesis of the word used in "as she was fleeing in *haste*" (2 Sam. 4:4). Jacob is saying: This flood, oncoming like water—because of it, you shall no longer excel. **My couch he mounted!** Rather, "it," your impulsiveness, mounted, destructively, like water, as when the Euphrates "shall rise above all its channels, and flow over all its beds, and swirl through Judah like a flash flood" (Isa. 8:7–8). The Sages read our phrase to say, "You profaned what mounted my couch"—the Shekhinah, which regularly "mounted" Jacob's couch. But Chronicles says quite clearly that "he defiled his father's *couch*" (1 Chron. 5:1)—not the Shekhinah. Admittedly this last verse might be using "his father's couch"

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **3 Reuben, you are my first-born.** And I freely admit that (Bekhor Shor).

4 Unstable. The precise word is a hapax legomenon, occurring only here (Masorah). **You shall excel no longer.** Rather, "you must not claim any extra." The word *al* cannot be predictive. He is being warned not to try to seize power over his brothers (Bekhor Shor). **My couch he mounted!** Some explain that he turned to the other sons as he said this. "Do not be surprised at my speaking so harshly to him—he has transgressed severely!" (Hizkuni).

RASHBAM **3 My might and first fruit of my vigor, exceeding in rank and exceeding in honor.** All these are saying essentially the same thing; biblical rhetoric is framed in parallel expressions. My "might" really refers to Jacob's money, as does even "my vigor"; for the latter word, see "I have become rich; I have gotten *power*!" (Hosea 12:9); "His own hands must give back his *wealth*" (Job 20:10). Jacob is saying, "You are my first-born, so you ought to have gotten the first share of my wealth, exceeding what your brothers got, and exceeding them in rank and honor as well—for you ought to have reigned over your brothers." But you are . . .

4 Unstable as water. Water that is poured away. So **you shall excel no longer.** You shall have neither the first-born's share nor the kingship. **For when you mounted your father's bed.** Rather, "because" you did so (OJPS). Reuben "was the first-born; but when he defiled his father's bed, his birthright was given to the sons of Joseph son of Israel, so he is not

IBN EZRA **3 Reuben, you are my first-born, my might and first fruit of my vigor.** In you my vigor first appeared. — For the first-born being called "first fruit" see "He struck every first-born in Egypt, the *first fruits* of their vigor in the tents of Ham" (Ps. 78:51). **Exceeding in rank.** That is, you *ought* to have exceeded in rank; literally, to have "extra." **And exceeding in honor.** Not "honor" but "power" (OJPS). This phrase is parallel to "exceeding in rank," as is common in prophecy.

4 Unstable as water. Unstable because you rushed like water. **You shall excel no longer.** Grammatically, for this to mean "you shall not *have* extra" it would have to be *tutar*, not *totar* (a passive Hophal, not a Hiphil). **[D]** But some take these first two phrases to mean that Reuben *left* nothing extra (matching the active Hiphil), like water that has spilled. But the negative *al* is always used with commands and jussive verbs. (Prov. 12:28 is the exception that proves the rule.) Jacob is not saying that Reuben *has* not "excelled," or left anything,

[D] See Special Topics, "Biblical Hebrew."

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NJPS 5Simeon and Levi are a pair;
Their weapons are tools of lawlessness.

OJPS 5Simeon and Levi are brethren;
weapons of violence their kinship.

5 שִׁמְעוֹן וְלֵוִי אַחִים
כְּלֵי חָמָס מְכֵרֹתֵיהֶם׃

RASHI who would customarily go "up to my couch" (OJPS). **[J]** "Couch" is a poetic synonym for "bed" here; the Hebrew word derives from a verb meaning "to make one's bed." See "when I call You to mind upon my *bed*" (Ps. 63:7) and many other examples.

5 Simeon and Levi are a pair. Literally, they are "brothers" (compare OJPS)—they were two minds with a single thought when it came to Shechem and to Joseph, when "they" said to one another, "Here comes that dreamer! Come now, let us kill him" (37:19–20). "They" must be Simeon and Levi. If you think it was Reuben or Judah who said this, remember that neither of them agreed to kill him. The sons of the maidservants? They did not hate him enough, for Joseph was "a helper to the sons of his father's wives Bilhah and Zilpah" (37:2). Issachar and Zebulun would not have spoken up like this in front of their older brothers. So it can only be Simeon and Levi, who are called "brothers" here by their father. **Their weapons.** The unusual word for "weapons" here is actually connected with the Greek word for "sword," according to the Tanhuma. Another reading: You were "at home" with weaponry: "By *origin* and birth you are from the land of the

[J] In his comment about this verse on B. Shab. 55b, Rashi says that, before the Tent of Meeting was set up, the Shekhinah would rest in the tents of the righteous.

KIMHI **5 Simeon and Levi are a pair.** Literally, "brothers" (compare OJPS). "Simeon and Levi, Jacob's two sons, brothers of Dinah" (34:25). **Their weapons are tools of lawlessness.** They killed the men of Shechem unjustly; even if Shechem himself had sinned, how had all the rest sinned? And they put me and my family in great danger—had it not been for God's mercy. For "a terror from God fell on the cities round about" (35:5). But "their weapons" should really be "[against] their homeland." The translation as "weapons" comes from the Tanhuma.

NAHMANIDES euphemistically. But if we allow that possibility, Jacob might even be referring to himself by "the one who mounted my couch." The straightforward sense of the verse, however, would seem to confirm my explanation of 35:22. Reuben's intent was to disqualify Bilhah from sleeping with his father any more so that she would not bear any more children and thus lessen his own inheritance. That is why Jacob imputes recklessness and impetuosity to him. His intent was to profit; instead, he caused himself loss.

5 Simeon and Levi are a pair. "Brethren" (OJPS), as it more literally says, meaning that their brotherly love made them angry about what had happened to their sister, Dinah. This was meant to defend what they did as a consequence of their anger, and to say that they did not deserve such great punishment—though their act of violence could not be forgiven. But in my opinion the implication is that they are perfect brothers, twins in thought and deed. As I explained in my comment to "because he had defiled their sister Dinah" (34:13), Jacob was angry at their violent crime—killing the men of the city who not only had done no wrong to them, but had all agreed to be circumcised. They would all have returned to the Lord and become part of the household of Abraham, of "the souls that they had made in Haran" (12:5). **Their weapons are tools of lawlessness.** OJPS follows Onkelos and the commentators in taking the tools of lawlessness to be "their kinship," not "their weapons." This understanding is based on the use of the word in "by *origin* and birth" (Ezek. 16:3); see also "the land of their *origin*" (Ezek. 29:14). They take our phrase to mean something like "[they had] tools of lawlessness in the land where they

RASHBAM reckoned as first-born in the genealogy; though Judah became more powerful than his brothers and a leader came from him, yet the birthright belonged to Joseph" (1 Chron. 5:1–2). **My couch he mounted!** Really Jacob is saying, "You would mount my couch!" Perfect verbs are often used to express a meaning other than the one-time past; e.g., "*Let me pay* the price of the land" (23:13). **[C]**

5 Their weapons. Rather, "their kinship" (OJPS). Compare "by *origin* and birth you are from the land of the Canaanites" (Ezek. 16:3). But that word is related to the Qal verb and ours to the Piel. **[D]** (The vowels are slightly different than one would expect because ר cannot take a *dagesh*.) It is not "their (other) relations" but "their relationship." Simeon and Levi were partners in crime. This was their "brotherhood."

[C] What Rashbam means by this is unclear; the verb in our phrase is third person, not second person. **[D]** See Special Topics, "Biblical Hebrew."

IBN EZRA but instructing him not to *expect* anything extra, because he was so reckless. Saadia understands these words to mean "Expect nothing extra, not even something as *insignificant* as water"; he thinks there is no metathesis here, **[E]** but takes *paḥaz* to come from the same root as the "worthless" fellows of Judg. 9:4. **You brought disgrace.** From the day you committed that disgrace, **my couch he mounted!** Rather, "my couch went up," it departed from me, it was "cut off" from me, as in "do not *take* me *away* in the midst of my days" (Ps. 102:25). This incident is explained in 1 Chron. 5:1–2: "He was the first-born; but when he defiled his father's bed, his birthright was given to the sons of Joseph son of Israel, so he is not reckoned as first-born in the genealogy; though Judah became more powerful than his brothers and a leader came from him, yet the birthright belonged to Joseph." But some explain "he is not reckoned as first-born" to refer to Joseph. He would receive the *share* of the first-born, but Reuben would still be *listed* first.

5 Simeon and Levi are a pair. Literally, "brothers" (compare OJPS), but this is a reference to the Shechem incident. **[F] Their weapons.** Some relate this word to "partiality" of Isa. 3:9, but grammatically that cannot be correct. Others connect it with "procure" of Deut. 2:6, but that is really a verb meaning "dig." Still others think the מ at the beginning of the word is part of the root, the standard verb meaning to "procure" or "buy," taking it to mean that their weapons (as it were) bought them and owned them, so that they "mocked at death" (Judg. 5:18). But I think the etymologically related word is "by *origin* and birth" (Ezek. 16:3). The preposition is missing in our

[E] See Nahmanides' comment. **[F]** See Genesis 34.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **5 Simeon and Levi are a pair.** And they always acted in concert. So he spoke to them as a pair, something he did not do to any of the other brothers (Hizkuni). **Their weapons.** Despite the Tanhuma, I don't think this word has anything to do with Greek; replace the *k* with a *g* and you find the Hebrew word for a saw, a cheese slicer, or a carpenter's plane. (Sounds that are made in the same place in the mouth regularly alternate with each other.) Jacob is saying that Simeon and Levi can even turn something not made for killing into a tool of lawlessness. In this case, they turned the circumcision that was to unify them into a tool to kill the men of Shechem (Gersonides). In context, the word must mean that "their dealings"—whether literally their buying and selling, or their schemes—are for them nothing other than tools of lawlessness (Abarbanel). Had it not been for this, the honor due to Reuben would have fallen to them (Sforno).

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NJPS 6Let not my person be included in their council,
Let not my being be counted in their assembly.
For when angry they slay men,
And when pleased they maim oxen.

OJPS 6Let my soul not come into their council;
unto their assembly let my glory not be united;
for in their anger they slew men,
and in their self-will they houghed oxen.

6 בְּסֹדָם֙ אַל־תָּבֹ֣א נַפְשִׁ֔י
בִּקְהָלָ֖ם אַל־תֵּחַ֣ד כְּבֹדִ֑י
כִּ֤י בְאַפָּם֙ הָרְג֣וּ אִ֔ישׁ
וּבִרְצֹנָ֖ם עִקְּרוּ־שֽׁוֹר׃

RASHI Canaanites" (Ezek. 16:3). That, at any rate, is how Onkelos translates it. **Tools of lawlessness.** This profession of murder is in your hands illegally. It is from Esau's blessing, **[K]** not yours. You have robbed him of it.

6 Let not my person be included in their council. A reference to the Zimri affair. When the tribe of Simeon assembled to bring the Midianite woman before Moses and said to him, "Is she forbidden or permitted? If you say she is forbidden, who permitted Jethro's daughter to you?" **[L]** Jacob meant, "Let my name not be mentioned in connection with that!" That is why Zimri is referred to as "Zimri son of Salu, chieftain of a Simeonite ancestral house" (Num. 25:14), but his ancestry is not traced back to Jacob. **Let not my being be counted in their assembly.** The same applies to the "assembly" of Korah, who "assembled the whole community" (Num. 16:19) against Moses and Aaron at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting; Korah, of course, was from the tribe of Levi. "Let not my being be counted" is simply a poetic way of saying, "Let my name not be mentioned." There too he is "Korah, son of Izhar son of Kohath son of Levi" (Num. 16:1), stopping short of adding "son of Jacob." But when his descendants "the Kohathites," the Temple singers, are identified in Chronicles, he is "son of Izhar son of Kohath son of Levi son of Israel" (1 Chron. 6:22). A grammatical note: "Being" here is a masculine noun, but the verb has a ת prefix, not the third-person masculine singular י. It must therefore indicate the second person: "You, O my being, do not be counted with them." Compare the use of the same verb in "You shall not *be joined* in burial with them" (Isa. 14:20). **For when angry they slay men.** A reference to Hamor and the men of Shechem. The Hebrew literally says "a man," lumping them all together as if there were no more than one of them. See also "*Horse and driver* He has hurled into the

[K] See 27:40. **[L]** See Exod. 2:16–22.

KIMHI **6 Let not my person be included in their council.** Rather, "my person was not included in their council" when they planned the attack on Shechem; I was not involved. **Let not my being be counted in their assembly.** The parallel statement repeats the previous idea in different words. **When pleased they maim oxen.** Rather, "at

NAHMANIDES sojourned"—where they sojourned afterward. But in my view he was saying that tools of lawlessness *are* where they sojourn. That is their life; that is how they provide for themselves. That is why Jacob wanted to "scatter them" (v. 7).

6 Let not my person be included in their council. Jacob was also angry that they might say the whole thing was done with his counsel. It would be a desecration of the Name for a prophet to perpetrate such lawlessness and rapine. This is why he cursed "their anger" (v. 7). He is saying that he was not involved when they "answered with guile" (34:13). **Let not my being be counted in their assembly.** Nor was he involved when they assembled to enter the city and slaughter them. **For when angry they slay men, and when pleased they maim oxen.** It was their own pleasure that led them to direct their anger against Shechem, not any wrong done them by those they killed. But Onkelos reads the verse as if it said not *shor* but *shur* ("a wall"), taking the first phrase to mean that they killed the men and the second to mean that they uprooted an entire walled city, including women and children. The verb, too, therefore is not "maim" but "uproot," as in

RASHBAM **6 Let not my person be included in their council.** May it be God's will that I not be involved in their evil plan. Notice that *al* is used only to negate a wish, command, or curse for the future. It is never found with the past tense. So it cannot mean

IBN EZRA phrase, but that is common; see (e.g.) "the sacrifices and offerings that I have commanded [in] my habitation" (1 Sam. 2:29); "the gold and silver that were on hand [in] the House of the LORD" (2 Kings 16:8). The reference is to the violence they committed against the men of Shechem "in" *their* own homeland, treacherously killing them after making a covenant with them.

6 Let not my person be included in their council. Aaron ha-Cohen (of the Yeshiva of Pumbedita) explains the verb here as he explains the same verb in "the sun *sets*" (Eccles. 1:5)—"let my person not *set*, not depart, from their council." But his explanation is exactly the opposite of what it really says. How do "tools of lawlessness" jibe with his explanation? Remember that Jacob told these two, "You have brought trouble on me" (34:30). Jacob and his household were actually put into great danger by their actions. Had it not been for the "terror from God" that "fell on the cities round about" (35:5), the Canaanites would have surrounded them to prepare for their destruction. And yet this Aaron goes on to explain the whole verse in this contradictory manner. Let not *my* person be included in *his* council! **Let not my being be counted in their assembly.** Literally, "my glory"; NJPS follows Moses Gikatilla in taking it as parallel to "my person." Actually, this usage is found frequently in the book of Psalms, **[G]** and his interpretation is a fine one. Parallelism is regularly used in prophecy, e.g., in Num. 23:8 and Deut. 32:7. In fact, all the parts of these phrases are parallel:

Let not my person be included in their council,

Let not my being be counted in their assembly.

Judah ibn Bal'am the Spaniard says that Moses Gikatilla is wrong—the parallel is that the "glory" of one's person is the body, as the body itself can be adorned by a necklace. NJPS certainly agrees that "glory" is used that way in "let him trample my life to the ground, and lay my *body* in the dust" (Ps. 7:6). But I say that Judah himself is wrong. Look at "my whole *being* exults, and my body rests secure" (Ps. 16:9), where "glory" is *contrasted* to the body. As for Ps. 7:6, that is a metaphoric usage; note that OJPS there translates literally, "lay my *glory* in the dust." (Note, by the way, that "counted" here is more literally "counted *together*"—though Moses Gikatilla says it is related to the word "one"—and that "council" at the

[G] See Ps. 7:6 for an example.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **6 Let not my person be included in their council.** Let them not rule over my children (Bekhor Shor). I think he is condemning them not merely for what they did at Shechem; he is condemning Simeon for the events at Shittim described in Numbers 25 and Levi for the Korah rebellion of Numbers 16. One might well ask why the future *righteous* descendants of Reuben, Simeon, and Levi should be condemned, especially the Levites, who would serve in the sanctuary. But remember that Jacob is not issuing these blessings of his own free will. If he were, he would certainly have granted the kingship to Joseph, whom he loved more than

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NJPS [7]Cursed be their anger so fierce,
And their wrath so relentless.
I will divide them in Jacob,
Scatter them in Israel.
[8]You, O Judah, your brothers shall praise;

OJPS [7]Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce,
and their wrath, for it was cruel;
I will divide them in Jacob,
and scatter them in Israel.
[8]Judah, thee shall thy brethren praise;

7 אָרוּר אַפָּם כִּי עָז
וְעֶבְרָתָם כִּי קָשָׁתָה
אֲחַלְּקֵם בְּיַעֲקֹב
וַאֲפִיצֵם בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל׃ ס
8 יְהוּדָה אַתָּה יוֹדוּךָ אַחֶיךָ

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ "I will divide them in Jacob, scatter them in Israel" (v. 7) certainly applies to Levi, who did not receive his own geographical portion of the land, but how does it apply to Simeon?

RASHI sea" (Exod. 15:1); "you shall defeat Midian *to a man*" (Judg. 6:16). That is the midrashic interpretation, but the straightforward sense is that in Biblical Hebrew a group of men can be referred to by the singular as a way of pointing to each of them as an individual: "When angry, they slay every man at whom they are irate." "He learned to hunt prey—he devoured *men*" (Ezek. 19:3) actually also uses the singular in just this way: "He became a *man*-eater." **And when pleased they maim oxen.** They wanted to maim Joseph, who is called "a firstling *bull* in his majesty" (Deut. 33:17). For the verb, see "You shall *hamstring* their horses" (Josh. 11:6).

7 Cursed be their anger so fierce. Even when reproaching them, he did not curse *them*, but "their anger." As Balaam put it, "How can I damn whom God has not damned?" (Num. 23:8). **I will divide them in Jacob.** I will separate them from each other, so Levi will not be counted among the tribes. That will "divide" them. Another reading: The poor, the scribes, and the schoolteachers all come from Simeon, so they would be scattered. And he made the tribe of Levi go to the threshing floors to chase after their tithes. So Levi was scattered in a somewhat respectable way.

8 You, O Judah, your brothers shall praise. Since Jacob had reproached all the brothers up to this point, Judah began to sidle away in order not to be reproached for

KIMHI their pleasure." And they may have done this, though it is not mentioned. Jacob b. Eleazar, though, wrote in his grammar that "men" of our verse refers to great men and that therefore the parallel "oxen" is similarly a way of referring to the powerful. Since in Hebrew these words are singular, he takes "ox" as a reference to "Hamor the Hivite, chief of the country" (34:2). But *shor* can also mean "wall" (see Onkelos).

7 I will divide them in Jacob, scatter them in Israel. According to the Tanhuma, 24,000 men of the tribe of Simeon died in the Zimri affair, **[C]** and their widows were divided among the tribes, 2,000 each. Additionally, all those who beg from door to door are from the tribe of Simeon. To keep the Levites from mingling with them, the Holy One arranged that the Levites should be given a tithe of the crops. So they beg at the threshing floors, fulfilling Jacob's decree.

[C] See Numbers 25.

NAHMANIDES "Ekron shall be *uprooted*" (Zeph. 2:4). Others take "oxen" (the greatest of beasts) to refer to Hamor ("donkey") and his son Shechem, the "chief of the country" (34:2; see further Deut. 33:17 and Amos 4:1). The text elsewhere does call such men rams (e.g., Exod. 15:15) and he-goats (e.g., Isa. 14:9). But I think the expression is to be taken at face value: they killed the men they were angry at and then, at their leisure, hamstrung all the livestock (see Josh. 11:6), whether in the barns or in the field. Jacob is saying that he had no part in any of it.

7 Scatter them in Israel. As indeed happened; the settlements of Simeon were dispersed throughout the territory of Judah (see Joshua 19) and those of the Levites throughout all Israel.

RASHBAM "My person *was* not included in their council." **And when pleased they maim oxen.** Literally, they "uproot" them, but see "You shall *hamstring* their horses" (Josh. 11:6).

7 Cursed be their anger. They will not succeed, by their anger, in taking revenge or doing evil. And therefore **I will divide them in Jacob.** I do not want them working together. — And, indeed, Levi was scattered throughout the territories of the 12 tribes (as we see in Joshua 21). So Simeon was by himself, without Levi.

8 You, O Judah, your brothers shall praise. Anyone who translates this verb as "praise" is stupid. Jacob has denigrated the three older brothers, taking the kingship away from Reuben and scattering Simeon and Levi. He then says to Judah, "You, O Judah, your brothers will *give you*

IBN EZRA beginning of the verse is related to "they *scheme together*" of Ps. 31:14.) In short, Jacob is saying, "Count me out!" **For when angry they slay men.** Literally, "man"; but as the translations recognize, it is used here as the name of the species. (See similarly 32:6.) This, of course, is an allusion to the men of Shechem. **And when pleased they maim oxen.** Rather, "they uproot a wall." The latter word is also used in v. 22 of our chapter. As for the alternation of that word between *shor* (here) and *shur* (in v. 22), you will find it explained in my book *Sefer Moznayim*. **[H]** They uprooted the wall just as one pulls out a tendon to "hamstring" horses (see Josh. 11:6). This is proof that Shechem was a large city, since it was surrounded by a wall.

7 Cursed be their anger so fierce. This may be a prophecy or it may be a prayer—that their anger diminish (which would be good for them). "Cursed" is the opposite of "blessed," and blessing denotes increase, so a curse would signal diminution. **And their wrath.** Parallel to "their anger." **I will divide them in Jacob, scatter them in Israel.** Two more parallel phrases. He is saying that it would be better if they were separated, not united. And we do find that the lot of Simeon "lay inside the portion of the Judites" (Josh. 19:1), leaving him under someone else's authority. And even inside Judah the cities of the Simeonites were not located next to each other, but dispersed through the territory. As for the Levites, their 48 cities were scattered throughout the territory of all the tribes. **[I]**

8 You, O Judah. Rather, "you are Judah," that is, you are Judah by name and Judah by nature, as the text goes on to explain. **Your**

[H] A work on Hebrew grammar. **[I]** See Josh. 21:1–7.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS Judah. Notice that he gives a greater blessing to Dan, son of one of the maidservants, than to Rachel's son Benjamin, the delight of his old age. But the Holy One wanted them to know how seriously transgression would be punished (Abarbanel).

8 You, O Judah. Rather, "it's you, Judah!" Reuben, Simeon, and Levi having dropped out, the kingship falls to you (Sforno).

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NJPS Your hand shall be on the nape of your foes;
Your father's sons shall bow low to you.
9Judah is a lion's whelp;
On prey, my son, have you grown.
He crouches, lies down like a lion,
Like the king of beasts—who dare rouse him?

OJPS thy hand shall be on the neck of thine enemies;
thy father's sons shall bow down before thee.
9Judah is a lion's whelp;
from the prey, my son, thou art gone up.
He stooped down, he couched as a lion,
and as a lioness; who shall rouse him up?

יָדְךָ בְּעֹרֶף אֹיְבֶיךָ
יִשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ לְךָ בְּנֵי אָבִיךָ׃
9 גּוּר אַרְיֵה יְהוּדָה
מִטֶּרֶף בְּנִי עָלִיתָ
כָּרַע רָבַץ כְּאַרְיֵה
וּכְלָבִיא מִי יְקִימֶנּוּ׃

RASHI the Tamar episode. **[M]** So Jacob is reassuring him: "Judah, you are not like them." **Your hand shall be on the nape of your foes**. In David's time (using the same Hebrew word as our "nape"): "Made my enemies turn *tail* before me" (2 Sam. 22:41). **Your father's sons**. Who came from many wives, so he did not use the expression Isaac used when he said "let your *mother's* sons bow to you" (27:29).

9 Judah is a lion's whelp. In Hebrew syntax the words "lion's whelp" are reversed: a "whelp-lion." This is a prophecy of David, who was first a whelp: "when Saul was king over us, it was you who led Israel in war" (2 Sam. 5:2), and eventually became a "lion" when they crowned him king over them. Onkelos here says explicitly that he would have rulership at first and then eventually kingship. **On prey**. Rather, "*from* prey" (compare OJPS)—as I suspected you when I said (using the same root), "Joseph was *torn* by a beast!" (37:33), the "beast" being Judah, who is compared here to a lion. **My son, have you grown**. Jacob is saying, "From the prey of my son you have risen" (compare OJPS)—from treating my other son as your prey. You have outgrown that stage, for you said, "What do we gain by killing our brother and covering up his blood?" (37:26). And when Tamar was about to be killed, you admitted, "She is more in the right than I" (38:26). As a result . . . **He crouches, lies down like a lion**. In the days of Solomon, when "Judah and

[M] See Genesis 38.

KIMHI **9 Judah is a lion's whelp**. The Hebrew can be read to call him "a whelp, a lion." For Judah was a cub at first, but even a lion's cub rules over the other animals. And Judah was their leader from the very beginning: first in the offerings of the chieftains, first to attack the Canaanites, first against the Benjaminites, and even the first of the judges was a Judite: Othniel the Kenizzite. **[D]** Then David arose and became king—a lion. **On prey, my son, have you grown**. On a multitude of prey you have grown in fame and glory: "David gained fame when he returned from defeating Aram in the Valley of Salt" (2 Sam. 8:13). **He crouches, lies down like a lion**. As my father (of blessed memory) explained, a lion "crouches" when he is afraid, to be ready to spring; when he is not afraid, he "lies

[D] See Num. 7:12, Judg. 1:1–2, Judg. 20:18, and Judg. 3:9–11, respectively.

IBN EZRA **brothers shall praise**. The pun is *yehudah* (Judah) and *yodukha* ("shall praise you"). **Your father's sons shall bow low to you**. When they see that "your hand is on the nape of your foes." They will bow low to you as to a king, as we find they indeed did. **[J]**

9 A lion's whelp. A *gur* is a cub, in this case a lion cub. Note that this is a metaphor, and not an explicit simile. Compare "when a wild ass is born a man" (Job 11:12). As a shepherd, Jacob knew the ways of animals, and therefore likened his sons to them. **On prey, my son, have you grown**. He is saying, "To me, son, you seem like a lion who has gone up [not "grown"; see OJPS] from prey." That is the straightforward sense of the expression. For us to connect this expression with the Joseph incident, when Judah saved Joseph from being the others' prey, the verb would have to be "brought up," not the intransitive "gone up." Note that the next verse describes Judah's (intransitive) "rise" to greatness. For the transitive form of this verb, see "She *raised up* one of her cubs" (Ezek. 19:3). **He crouches, lies down like a lion**. After feeding,

[J] David came from the tribe of Judah.

RASHBAM *the majesty* of kingship." The end of the verse, where "your father's sons shall bow low to you," proves it. This word *hod* is always associated with kingship. When the Holy One tells Moses to transfer the kingship to Joshua, He says, "Invest him with some of your *authority*" (Num. 27:20). See also "royal *majesty*" (Dan. 11:21) and "The LORD made Solomon exceedingly great in the eyes of all Israel, and endowed him with a regal *majesty*" (1 Chron. 29:25). So the verb here does not mean "they shall praise you" but "they shall endow you with majesty." The ה one expects in the verb is elided; the same imperfect form may occur with or without the ה. For another example, compare the verb with the ה in 1 Sam. 17:47 to the same verb in 2 Kings 6:27 without it. The letters י and ה are interchangeable at the beginning of a root just as they are at the end of a root. **[E]** **Your father's sons shall bow low to you**. Because you will reign over them. He calls them "your father's sons" because they came from four different mothers. Notice that when Isaac blesses Jacob he says, "Let your *mother's* sons bow to you" (27:29).

9 Judah is a lion's whelp. "Lion's whelp" is the correct translation. The young lion is called *gur*; see "What a lioness was your mother among the lions! Crouching among the great beasts, she reared her *cubs*" (Ezek. 19:2). The young lion is faster and fiercer than an older lion, which is why Judah is compared to a "whelp." **On prey, my son, have you grown**. Rather, "*from* prey, my son, have you *gone up*" (compare OJPS). Having gotten up from seizing prey among the nations, though you have now lain down in your own city, no enemy will come to startle you or rouse you from your place. That is

[E] This is a guess at Rashbam's meaning; his comment as we have it is garbled.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **9 Judah is a lion's whelp**. In my opinion, this is a reference to David, who tells Saul in 1 Sam. 17:34 that as a shepherd he was perfectly capable of handling the situation "if a lion or a bear came and carried off an animal from the flock" (Gersonides). Not yet a lion, not yet being a king; but for now he will rule his brothers. The kingship will come in due time (Sforno). **On prey, my son, have you grown**. Rather, "you, my son, have outpreyed everyone." Others take the literal "from prey you have gone up" (compare OJPS) to mean "you have left your prey voluntarily, of your own free will"—no one could force you to do that until you wanted to. Joseph Kara points to Isa. 31:4 in this connection: "As a lion growls over its prey and, when the shepherds gather in force against him, is not dismayed by their cries nor cowed by their noise" (Bekhor Shor). This cannot refer to the sale of Joseph; as B. Sanh. 6b reminds us, anyone who praises Judah for his role in that is a blasphemer. The translation of Onkelos demonstrates that "rising from prey" here is a reference to the Tamar story of Genesis 38. "From the sentence of death passed on Tamar and the twins she was pregnant with, my son, you have removed yourself" (Hizkuni). Since the "lion" is David, the "prey" is obviously Goliath. From killing Goliath, David "grew" or

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NJPS [10]The scepter shall not depart from Judah,
Nor the ruler's staff from between his feet;
So that tribute shall come to him

OJPS [10]The scepter shall not depart from Judah,
nor the ruler's staff from between his feet,
as long as men come to Shiloh;

10 לֹא־יָסוּר שֵׁבֶט מִיהוּדָה
וּמְחֹקֵק מִבֵּין רַגְלָיו
עַד כִּי־יָבֹא שִׁילֹה וְלוֹ

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ How can he say that "the scepter shall not depart from Judah" (v. 10), when in fact neither Saul, the first king, nor Jeroboam and his successors as kings of Israel came from the tribe of Judah? Neither did the Hasmoneans or the Herodians in Second Temple times—after which the "scepter departed" from *all* the tribes. Whether "tribute shall come to him" (see the commentators) refers to David or to the Messiah—may he appear speedily!—this simply was not fulfilled.

RASHI Israel from Dan to Beer-sheba dwelt in safety, everyone under his own vine and under his own fig tree" (1 Kings 5:5).

10 The scepter shall not depart from Judah. That is, from David and his descendants. This refers to the Exilarchs in Babylonia, who indeed ruled over the people with "the scepter," since they were royal appointees. **Nor the ruler's staff from between his feet.** Not "the ruler's staff" but "the lawgiver," that is, the students of Torah. These are the Patriarchs in the land of Israel. **So that tribute shall come to him.** The straightforward sense of the Hebrew is actually "until Shiloh comes"; NJPS adopts a midrashic reading—not "Shiloh" but *shai lo*,

KIMHI down" quietly. David was always ready to spring at his enemies and kill them as a lion kills the other beasts, but Solomon could "lie down," having no fear of war, since all the other nations served him and were afraid of him.

10 The scepter. A man who is in charge of others disciplines them with a stick; the ruler's scepter symbolizes this. **Nor the ruler's staff from between his feet.** Not the staff but "the ruler" himself shall not depart from "between his legs." That is, subsequent rulers shall come from among his sons. The "ruler" is the one who gives the laws; the two words are related in Hebrew. **So that tribute shall come to him.** Rather, "until his son comes" (*shiloh* is a variant of *shilyah*, "afterbirth.") This is saying that leadership will continue

NAHMANIDES **10 The scepter shall not depart from Judah.** This is not saying that it will never depart, for it is written afterward, "The LORD will drive you, and the king you have set over you, to a nation unknown to you or your fathers" (Deut. 28:36), sending both them and their king into exile. At this point they would no longer have a king and a government; indeed, for many days "there was no king in Israel" (Judg. 17:6, 18:1, 21:25). The prophet is not promising the Israelites that, given they are ruled by Judah, they will never go into captivity for any reason whatsoever. Rather, "the scepter shall not depart from Judah" and be transferred to one of his brothers. Kingship in Israel would belong to him; none of the other brothers would rule over him. **Nor the ruler's staff from between his feet.** Rather, "the legislator." No one would issue laws to Israel but one on whose hand was the signet ring of a king from the tribe of Judah. He would rule and command all Israel. **So that tribute shall come to him.** Rather, "until his son comes" and the homage of peoples be his. This is the Messiah. For the scepter alludes to David, the first king who had a royal scepter, and "Shiloh" (OJPS) to his son, to whom would come "the homage of peoples" so that he could do as he pleased. Ibn Ezra's assertion that Shiloh refers to David cannot be possible, since the scepter did not belong to Judah before David. Respect and even leadership are one thing, the royal scepter quite another. Our verse implies that Jacob has crowned the tribe of Judah king over their brothers, giving them rulership over Israel—and this is just what David said: "The LORD God of Israel chose me of all my father's house to be king over Israel forever. For He chose Judah to be ruler, and of the family of

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS (more literally) "rose" to become king of Israel (Gersonides). You have "risen from" prey—you have outgrown the taking of prey (Abarbanel). You, my son Joseph, have risen from being Judah's prey, because . . . (Sforno). **He crouches, lies down like a lion.** When Judah crouches like a lion in his own land, no one can dislodge him from there (Bekhor Shor). So, of the two characteristics of the lion, Judah does not have the bad one but does have the good one (Abarbanel). Like a lion, Judah lay down and did not cause your death, Joseph (Sforno).

10 The scepter shall not depart from Judah. The verse is assuring Judah, "Have no fear that you will live humbly until kingship comes to you. You will always hold the scepter of rulership and be considered powerful" (Bekhor Shor). This is not a command to the others not to seize it, but a promise to Judah that he will have it. It can hardly be that this is a promise about nothing more than the reigns of David and Solomon. But notice that Jacob said "the scepter"—he was deliberately careful *not* to mention kingship. Judah exercised leadership as early as the time of Joseph—which is why the brothers heeded what he said in 37:26–27—and his tribe is listed first in Numbers 2, 7, and 34; Joshua 15; and Judges 1. Note that 1 Sam. 11:8 and 15:4 deliberately list the men of Judah separately from the rest of Israel. Even in our current long exile, it is clear that the leaders of our people have always come from the tribe of Judah, from Joseph's time right through to today, when the majority of us are from that tribe (Abarbanel). The scepter will not depart from Judah to another of the tribes. When foreigners rule, that is not "departure"; a thing that disappears does not "depart" (Sforno). **So that tribute shall come to him.** Shiloh is not spelled with a final ה anywhere but here (Masorah). When Shiloh's time has come, kingship will come to Judah. As vv. 60

RASHBAM essentially the straightforward meaning. "My son" is parallel to "Judah" in the previous phrase. Whoever reads the verse as if it were saying "from the prey of my son" (referring to the sale of Joseph) does not understand anything about (1) biblical rhetoric or (2) biblical punctuation.

10 The scepter shall not depart from Judah. The kingship that was given him, the right to have all 12 brothers bow down to him—that greatness will not cease from him, **nor the ruler's staff from between his feet**—dominion will not depart from his offspring . . . **So that tribute shall come to him.** Rather, ". . . until he [Judah] comes to Shiloh" (compare OJPS). This refers to the king descended from Judah—Rehoboam son of Solomon—who will come to Shiloh (which is close to Shechem) to renew the

IBN EZRA a lion lies down on its haunches. If another animal—of any species whatsoever—passes by at that time, the lion does not flee; it does not even bother to get up.

10 The scepter shall not depart from Judah. The scepter of greatness shall not depart from Judah before reaching David, who will inaugurate the kingdom of Judah. And this too certainly happened. Note that, when the Israelites were in the wilderness, "the first standard to set out . . . was the division of Judah" (Num. 10:14). Note too that, when asked, "Which of us shall be the first to go up against the Canaanites and attack them?" the Holy One replied, "Let [the tribe of] Judah go up" (Judg. 1:1–2). **The ruler's staff.** Rather, "the scribe," one who "inscribes" things on a document; there is always a scribe at the official's feet. **So that tribute shall come to him.** Some follow the Aramaic translator, who takes *shiloh* as *shelo*, "his." Others think *shiloh* is somehow related to *shilyah* ("afterbirth"; see Deut. 28:57) or rabbinic *shalil* ("embryo"). Others, like OJPS, think it refers to the city of Shiloh, but once again take the verb "come" as used in Eccles. 1:5 (see my comment to v. 6)—"until [the city of] Shiloh

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NJPS And the homage of peoples be his.
[11]He tethers his ass to a vine,
His ass's foal to a choice vine;

OJPS and unto him shall the obedience of the peoples be.
[11]Binding his foal unto the vine,
and his ass's colt unto the choice vine;

וְלוֹ יִקְהַת עַמִּים׃
[11] אֹסְרִי לַגֶּפֶן עִירֹה וְלִשֹׂרֵקָה בְּנִי אֲתֹנוֹ

RASHI "tribute to him," as in "all who are around Him shall bring *tribute* to the Awesome One" (Ps. 76:12). But Shiloh refers to the King Messiah, for kingship is *shelo*, "his." Onkelos indeed translates it as "Messiah." **And the homage of peoples be his.** Rather, "the gathering" of peoples—for "nations shall seek his counsel" (Isa. 11:10). The phrase *yikkehat ammim* here might easily have appeared as *kehiyyat ammim*; roots that begin with י—like those that begin with נ and א—sometimes drop the first root letter.

11 He tethers his ass to a vine. This is a prophecy about the *land* of Judah, which will flow with wine like a fountain. The people of Judah will tie up their asses to the vines,

KIMHI with Judah until eventually it rises to the level of kingship, with David. Other interpretations: until "his" comes to him (a reference to the Messiah); until the one comes of whom rulership is "his" (David). It is like telling someone, "Take this for the time being. Eventually I will give you more."

11 His ass's foal to a choice vine. All this is to say that Judah's territory will be so rich that everyone will be able to tie his ass to a vine without worry. There will be so many

NAHMANIDES Judah, my father's house; and of my father's sons, He preferred to make me king over all Israel" (1 Chron. 28:4). Saying the scepter would "not depart" from Judah hints that another tribe would rule Israel first. Only when the scepter passed into the hands of Judah would rulership never again pass to another tribe: "the LORD God of Israel gave David kingship over Israel forever—to him and his sons" (2 Chron. 13:5). As for Saul, since requesting a king at that time was a rejection of the Holy One, He did not want to give them their eternal king, but only a temporary one (see Hosea 13:11). **[F] And the homage of peoples be his.** They will heed him and do everything he commands them. The Hebrew word is related to "Parents have eaten sour grapes and children's teeth are *blunted*" (Jer. 31:29), referring to weakness and breakage: "if the ax has become *dull*" (Eccles. 10:10). So it is not the "homage" of peoples but their subservience, their "obedience" (OJPS). **[G]** The oppressor's rod shall not depart from Judah until at last a descendant of his arrives who will wield the sword and make the nations subservient to him. The root קהה refers to weakness.

[F] We omit most of Nahmanides' long survey of the history of Israelite kingship up through the time of the Hasmoneans.
[G] Here too we omit a long discussion of the use of this root in Hebrew.

IBN EZRA comes to an end." Do not forget that "He forsook the tabernacle of Shiloh" (Ps. 78:60) is followed by "He chose David, His servant, and took him from the sheepfolds" (Ps. 78:70). This is actually not implausible. Alternatively, the *–oh* suffix could be the 3 m. s. suffix "his" (which is sometimes spelled with an *h* at the end; see 9:21). Then *shiloh* might actually mean "his son," relating the first part of the word to "Did I ask my lord for a son? Didn't I say: 'Don't *cause* me *to give birth*'?" (2 Kings 4:28). **And the homage of peoples be his.** Compare "the *homage* due a mother" (Prov. 30:17). But here the word is really a verb, "Peoples will *turn in homage* to him," as indeed many peoples did to David and his son Solomon. The one thing our verse most certainly does not mean is that "the scepter shall depart from him when Shiloh comes"; that would hardly be a blessing. And since vv. 11–12 continue the blessing, it could hardly be canceled here. **[K]** Our verse is framed the same way as saying, "So-and-So will not lack bread 'until' [to the extent that] even many fields and vineyards will come to him." For a biblical example, see "I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you" (28:15)—that He would bring him back to the land.

RASHBAM monarchy there. But then 10 tribes will depart from him and crown Jeroboam and not leave Rehoboam any tribes but Judah and Benjamin. **And the homage of peoples be his.** Rather, the "assemblage" of peoples, the nations who were bent under the yoke of his father, Solomon, who "controlled the whole region west of the Euphrates—all the kings west of the Euphrates, from Tiphsah to Gaza" (1 Kings 5:4). They all gathered to crown Rehoboam: "Rehoboam went to Shechem, for all Israel had come to Shechem to acclaim him king" (1 Kings 12:1). And Shechem is near Shiloh. Notice that at the end of his life "Joshua assembled all the tribes of Israel at Shechem" (Josh. 24:1), and indeed the whole chapter takes place "at Shechem" (Josh. 24:25); but as part of this occasion Joshua "took a great stone and set it up at the foot of the oak *in the sacred precinct of the LORD*" (Josh. 24:26). And Judg. 21:19 tells us explicitly that Shiloh "lies north of Bethel, east of the highway that runs from Bethel to Shechem." Jeremiah also tells us of an occasion when "eighty men came from Shechem, Shiloh, and Samaria" (Jer. 41:5). There was a stretch of open ground in Shechem, around "the oak" (Josh. 24:26) at Shechem, which was a suitable spot for people to gather out of respect for "the sacred precinct of the LORD" which was nearby. All this—which is the straightforward sense of our verse—is a refutation of the heretics. There is nothing written here but "Shiloh" (OJPS), the name of a city. For there are no foreign words in Scripture. **[F]** There is no "his" here (as the Hebrews say) nor any "messiah" (as the Christians say). Jacob is, plain and simple, explaining the greatness that will last from Judah all the way up to Rehoboam. He did not want to say explicitly what would happen after that, but the implication of the text is that from Shiloh on the greatness diminishes.

11 He tethers his ass to a vine. An ass need be tied to only a single vine to load it up, there will be so many grapes. **His ass's foal to a choice vine.** Again, this phrase is

[F] We do not know what Rashbam is referring to here.

11 Tethers. The י suffix conveys no additional meaning; compare "*enthroned* in heaven" (Ps. 123:1); "a *mare* in Pharaoh's chariots" (Song 1:9). **His ass.** For this word, see "He had thirty sons, who rode on thirty *burros*" (Judg. 10:4). **His ass's foal.** Here we have a

[K] This last sentence and a half was recorded by Joseph of Morville.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS and 70 of Psalm 78 tell us, the Holy One "forsook the tabernacle of Shiloh" and then "chose David, His servant, and took him from the sheepfolds" (Bekhor Shor). The departure of the scepter when "Shiloh" comes refers to Ahijah, the prophet from Shiloh, who removes 10 tribes from Rehoboam's kingdom in 1 Kings 11:29–39 (Hizkuni). Our expression is saying that leadership will remain in the hands of Judah all the way through to the time when his descendant, the Messiah, arrives (Abarbanel). "Shiloh" is a portmanteau word for "tranquility at last" (Sforno). **The homage of peoples.** Judah will rule only over his own brothers until the eventual period of tranquility when "the weakness of peoples" (as the phrase really means) will enable him to rule over them all (Sforno).

11 He tethers his ass to a vine. Do not think that Judah seizes prey because his land is not blessed and he has nothing to eat. He is

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NJPS He washes his garment in wine,
His robe in blood of grapes.
12His eyes are darker than wine;
His teeth are whiter than milk.

OJPS he washeth his garments in wine,
and his vesture in the blood of grapes;
12His eyes shall be red with wine,
and his teeth white with milk.

כִּבֵּס בַּיַּיִן לְבֻשׁוֹ
וּבְדַם־עֲנָבִים סותה סוּתֹוֹ׃
12 חַכְלִילִי עֵינַיִם מִיָּיִן
וּלְבֶן־שִׁנַּיִם מֵחָלָב׃ פ

RASHI and each ass will have a full load from no more than a single vine. (For the extra י ending on the participle, compare "He *raises* the poor from the dust" of Ps. 113:7 and "*enthroned* in heaven" of Ps. 123:1.) **A choice vine**. This is a single word in Hebrew, referring to a "long" vine. **He washes his garment in wine**. All this, of course, implies a great bounty of wine. **His robe**. This certainly refers to a garment of some kind, but the word does not occur anywhere else in the Bible. **His ass's foal**. Here too the Hebrew has an extraneous י. Onkelos translates all this with reference to the Messiah. The vine is Israel, the ass is Jerusalem. The choice vine too is Israel: "I planted you with noble vines" (Jer. 2:21). The "ass's foal" (*beni atono*) he rereads as *banei itono*, "they build His Temple," taking *aton* as a pun on "the *outer* gate" in Ezekiel's description of the future Temple (Ezek. 40:15). He then translates the whole thing a second time: The vine is the righteous and the ass's foal those who learn Torah. This is based on "You riders on tawny she-asses" (Judg. 5:10). **[N]** Washing one's garment in wine he interprets as dying it royal purple, which is the same color as wine; he connects the "robe" word with colors as well because it sounds like the verb "to entice." And women put on dyed garments to entice men to look at them.

12 His eyes are darker than wine. "Darker" refers to redness, as Onkelos points out; his eyes are "red with wine" (OJPS). See also "Who has *bleary* eyes?" (Prov. 23:29). Drinkers' eyes get red. **His teeth are whiter than milk**. They are white "*with* milk" (OJPS), for his land will have good pasture for flocks of sheep. The verse is saying that their eyes will be red from so much wine and their teeth white from so much milk. Onkelos, though, takes "eyes" as metaphoric for mountains (from which one can see a long distance). Once again he translates both phrases a second time, taking the eyes as fountains and the flowing of the vats, and the teeth, by a clever use of Aramaic, as the valleys between the mountains.

[N] B. Er. 54b interprets this expression as referring to scholars who ride from town to town to study.

KIMHI grapes on a single vine—so many that he can wash his clothes in wine, if he wants. This is hyperbole, of course.

12 His eyes are darker than wine. Rather, "his look"—his face—"will be red from wine" (more hyperbole). **His teeth are whiter than milk**. Some take "teeth" to mean the crags, flowing white with the milk oozing from the udders of the sheep, goats, and cows, who will have so much of it. But vv. 11–12 can certainly be understood as referring metaphorically to the King Messiah; on another level, all these describe sense impressions, which in his case will be replaced by intellectual apprehensions. For intellection is far superior to action. **[E]** Our Patriarch Jacob said all these things by means of the spirit of prophecy.

[E] We omit Kimhi's extensive discussion of these topics.

NAHMANIDES **12 His eyes are darker than wine**. "His eyes shall be red with wine" (OJPS) follows the commentators who link this expression with the "bleary eyes" of Prov. 23:29, but it seems to me that our word is a metathesis of the word in "you bathed, *painted* your eyes, and donned your finery" (Ezek. 23:40). The doubling of the ל is not uncommon. Do not forget that the kohl used in that verse is related to "alcohol." As others darken their eyes and whiten their teeth with various cosmetics, he will darken his eyes with wine and whiten his teeth with milk. It is a metaphor for the abundance of wine and milk his land will have. **[H]**

[H] We omit Nahmanides' discussion of Prov. 23:29.

RASHBAM parallel to the previous one; see "riding on an ass, on a donkey foaled by a she-ass" (Zech. 9:9) for the animal pair. Compare what we read about in the days of Solomon, when everyone in Judah and Israel dwelt "under his own vine and under his own fig tree" (1 Kings 5:5)—"under" the vines that were bent down with abundance of wine. **He washes his garment in wine**. When the grapes are gathered and crushed in the vats, their clothes would be stained: "Why is your clothing so red, your garments like his who treads grapes? . . . All My clothing was stained" (Isa. 63:2–3). After treading on them, they would drink the wine; see v. 12. **His robe.** The unusual Hebrew word is another kind of garment.

12 His eyes are darker than wine. More precisely, they are "red" with wine (OJPS). "Who has *bleary* eyes? Those whom wine keeps till the small hours" (Prov. 23:29–30). **His teeth are whiter than milk**. Rather, they are white "with" milk, that is, from drinking milk: "I have drunk my wine and my milk" (Song 5:1); "Ho, all who are thirsty, come, buy . . . wine and milk without cost" (Isa. 55:1).

IBN EZRA second superfluous י. Note that "tethers" is doing double duty here. **A choice vine**. Parallel, of course, to the "vine" of the first part of the verse, just as "his ass's foal" is parallel to "his ass." (The next two phrases are parallel as well.) **He washes his garment in wine**. Because his vines will produce so much that he can tether his ass to a vine and not care whether it eats any of the grapes. He will have so much wine he can wash his clothes in it. **His robe in blood of grapes**. Some think *suto* ("his robe") is really *kesuto* ("his covering") but missing the initial כ. I think it is from סוה, the same root as the "veil" that Moses wears in Exod. 34:33–34. "Blood" is metaphoric for wine, since both are red, and indeed this whole section is metaphoric, as when Joel says, "The mountains shall drip with wine, the hills shall flow with milk" (Joel 4:18).

12 His eyes are darker than wine. Following the metaphor, his eyes will be red "with wine" (OJPS), *from* wine. One's eyes growing "darker" is the usual result of overindulgence. The NJPS translation follows Saadia. **His teeth are whiter than milk**. Here too his teeth will be white "with milk"—from drinking so much of it. Both of these phrases are actually nominal, not verbal ("the whiteness of his teeth"). Note that "teeth" takes the dual ending in Hebrew, since there are two rows of them. Some think whiteness of the teeth implies that he will not eat anything unclean, and redness of the eyes that he will not "follow his eyes" (as in Num. 15:39). But this is a mishmash of a midrash.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS seizing it only to distribute it among his poorer brothers (Bekhor Shor). This, of course, as Zech. 9:9 tells us, is one of the signs of the Messiah. He will not ride on a warhorse; the fighting will all have concluded (at God's hands) before he arrives. He will become king in peace (Sforno). **His ass's foal to a choice vine**. His peaceable kingdom will be based among the People of Israel, who are likened to a vine in Isa. 5:7. "For the vineyard of the LORD of Hosts is the House of Israel" (Sforno).

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NJPS 13Zebulun shall dwell by the seashore;
He shall be a haven for ships,
And his flank shall rest on Sidon.
14Issachar is a strong-boned ass,
Crouching among the sheepfolds.
15When he saw how good was security,
And how pleasant was the country,
He bent his shoulder to the burden,
And became a toiling serf.

OJPS 13Zebulun shall dwell at the shore of the sea,
and he shall be a shore for ships,
and his flank shall be upon Zidon.
14Issachar is a large-boned ass,
couching down between the sheep-folds.
15For he saw a resting-place that it was good,
and the land that it was pleasant;
and he bowed his shoulder to bear,
and became a servant under task-work.

13 זְבוּלֻן לְחוֹף יַמִּים יִשְׁכֹּן
וְהוּא לְחוֹף אֳנִיֹּת
וְיַרְכָתוֹ עַל־צִידֹן׃ ס
14 יִשָּׂשכָר חֲמֹר גָּרֶם
רֹבֵץ בֵּין הַמִּשְׁפְּתָיִם׃
15 וַיַּרְא מְנֻחָה כִּי טוֹב
וְאֶת־הָאָרֶץ כִּי נָעֳמָה
וַיֵּט שִׁכְמוֹ לִסְבֹּל
וַיְהִי לְמַס־עֹבֵד׃ ס

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why is "Zebulun" (v. 13) mentioned before Issachar when he was born after him? ✦ Is saying that Issachar "bent his shoulder to the burden" (v. 15) meant to be praise or condemnation?

RASHI **13 Zebulun shall dwell by the seashore.** His land would be on the shore of the sea, the "district" of the sea, as Onkelos has it—the "marches," as we call it in French. He will be frequently found in the shipping district, the port where ships bring their cargo. For Zebulun was engaged in trade, providing sustenance to the tribe of Issachar, who were engaged in Torah study. As Moses put it, "Rejoice, O Zebulun, on your journeys, and Issachar, in your tents" (Deut. 33:18)—Zebulun would journey forth to trade and Issachar would stay in their tents engaged in Torah study. **And his flank shall rest on Sidon.** His northern border would be next to Sidon. "Flank" refers to his "extremity," as in "the *rear* of the Tabernacle" (Exod. 26:22).

14 Issachar is a strong-boned ass. Able to bear the burden of Torah. The image is of an ass on whom a heavy burden is loaded. **Crouching among the sheepfolds.** Like an ass who must trudge on day and night without a home where he may sleep. When he needs to rest, he must crouch on the outskirts of the towns to which he is bringing the cargo.

15 When he saw how good was security. He saw that his portion was a blessed, fertile land, so . . . **He bent his shoulder to the burden.** The yoke of Torah. This verb ordinarily means "stretch"; for its use as "bent" or "bowed" (OJPS), see "He bent the sky and came down" (2 Sam. 22:10); "Bend your ear to what I say" (Ps. 78:1). **And became a toiling serf.** For all his Israelite brothers, to supply them with teachings of Torah and calendrical calculations: "the Issacharites, men who knew how to interpret the signs of the times, to determine how Israel should act; their chiefs"—the heads of the various courts—

KIMHI **14 Crouching among the sheepfolds.** Rather, "crouching under his burdens." Notice that the Hebrew word is dual, implying two burdens, one on the right side and one on the left. Again, all this is metaphoric.

IBN EZRA **13 Zebulun.** Up to this point the tribes are listed in birth order. But now Zebulun is bumped ahead of Issachar, since Issachar's share of the land fell between his and Dan's. In the parallel chapter, Deuteronomy 33, Moses took a different tack. **Shall dwell by the seashore.** This shows clearly that these are not blessings, but prophecies. "Shore" is related to the verb in "ever does He protect him" (Deut. 33:12); this is not just a seacoast, but a protected harbor. For ships cannot stay in a place that is open to the winds. **And his flank shall rest on Sidon.** "Shall rest" is not in the Hebrew, but the point of the phrase is certainly that his flank shall reach that far.

14 Issachar is a strong-boned ass. The Hebrew syntax is not adjective-noun, but a noun construct phrase, making it grammatically possible that "crouching" refers to the bone and not to the ass; the translations make the correct interpretation obvious. **[L] Crouching among the sheepfolds.** Rather, "between the ranks." The word may be related to "May You *appoint* well-being for us" (Isa. 26:12).

15 When he saw how good was security, and how pleasant was the country. When he saw that his land and his place of "rest" (see OJPS) were so pleasant. **He bent his shoulder to the burden, and became a toiling serf.** The tribe of Issachar were not men of

[L] Ibn Ezra's point is unclear; I have chosen one reasonable understanding of his comment.

RASHBAM **13 By the seashore.** The "lip" of the sea, where it crashes against the cliffs. If you ask what good that is—since there is no way to get down to the water to transact business—the text goes on to explain: **He shall be a haven for ships.** In the port, the shore is lower down. Ships can come in, and the people come down to buy the merchandise in the ships. **On Sidon.** A place of immense commerce: "You traders of Sidon . . . thronged by seafarers" (Isa. 23:2); **[G]** "Sidon . . . this stronghold of the sea" (Isa. 23:4). This is why Moses said, "Rejoice, O Zebulun, on your journeys" (Deut. 33:18)—on your journeys to sea for trading purposes.

14 Issachar is a strong-boned ass. Unlike Zebulun, who goes out to sea to trade, Issachar works his land like "a strong-boned ass" **crouching among the sheepfolds.** Rather, "the fields." The word refers to the areas of the city that were set aside for tilling the soil: "Happy shall you be who sow by all waters, who send out cattle and *asses*" to plow and plant (Isa. 32:20). As Moses continued, ". . . and Issachar, in your tents" (Deut. 32:18).

15 When he saw how good was security. When Issachar saw how much more secure working the land was than going far away to trade. **And how pleasant was the country.** How pleasant and how prosperous. Note that these two ideas are parallel

[G] Our text of Rashbam mistakenly identifies this quotation as coming from Ezekiel.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **13 Zebulun shall dwell by the seashore.** I don't know why Zebulun is mentioned before Issachar—but Moses did the same thing in Deut. 33:18. See also vv. 16–21, where Naphtali should have come immediately after Dan (Bekhor Shor). Zebulun is mentioned before Issachar because he was engaged in business and gave Issachar financial support from the proceeds (Hizkuni). Zebulun is mentioned first because they got their portion (in Joshua 19) before Issachar got theirs. But we do not really know why tribes are listed here out of order (Gersonides). Zebulun comes before Issachar because, as Aristotle tells us, traders outrank agricultural laborers (Abarbanel). **And his flank shall rest on Sidon.** Which was a place of business, as Isa. 23:2 tells us: "You traders of Sidon" (Hizkuni).

14 Crouching among the sheepfolds. Rather, "between the two frames" on which his burden is loaded, one on either side of him (Gersonides).

15 He bent his shoulder to the burden. The double burden of Torah study and public service (Sforno).

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NJPS [16]Dan shall govern his people,
As one of the tribes of Israel.
[17]Dan shall be a serpent by the road,
A viper by the path,

OJPS [16]Dan shall judge his people,
as one of the tribes of Israel.
[17]Dan shall be a serpent in the way,
a horned snake in the path,

16 דָּן יָדִין עַמּוֹ
כְּאַחַד שִׁבְטֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל׃
17 יְהִי־דָן נָחָשׁ עֲלֵי־דָרֶךְ
שְׁפִיפֹן עֲלֵי־אֹרַח

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ The same question applies to his saying that Dan shall govern his people "as one of the tribes of Israel" (v. 16): praise or condemnation?

RASHI "were 200, and all their kinsmen followed them" (1 Chron. 12:33). But Onkelos takes these last parts of the verse differently: He "bent his shoulder" to the burden of war, conquering the border regions. In this case it was the conquered people who "became a toiling serf."

16 Dan shall govern his people. Rather, he shall "enact justice" for his people, by taking revenge on the Philistines for them, as the verb is used in "the LORD will *vindicate* His people and take revenge for His servants" (Deut. 32:36). **As one of the tribes of Israel.** All Israel will be as one with him, and indeed he will govern them. This is a prophecy about Samson. **[O]** But one should also interpret "as one of the tribes" to mean that he will govern "like the [special] one of the tribes"—David, of the tribe of Judah.

17 A viper. A *shefifon*, a particular kind of serpent that I think gets its name because of the way it hisses when it strikes. **[P] That bites the horse's heels.** As serpents do; Dan

[O] See Judges 13–16. **[P]** See Rashi's comment to 3:15.

KIMHI **17 Dan shall be a serpent by the road, a viper by the path.** Most animals travel in packs, but snakes travel alone—yet a single serpent can kill many. This is just what Samson, who was from Dan, did, one lone man who killed multitudes of Israel's enemies: "With the jaw of an ass I have slain a thousand men" (Judg. 15:16).

NAHMANIDES **16 Dan shall govern his people.** The same verb, a homonym for Dan, is found in "the LORD will *vindicate* His people" (Deut. 32:36). Dan will take vengeance for all the tribes of Israel at once. This is about the Philistines, who wronged the Israelites over and over again, starting in the days of Shamgar son of Anath. In the time of Jephthah the Holy One "surrendered Israel to the Philistines" (Judg. 10:7). After the time of Abdon son of Hillel, again "the LORD delivered them into the hands of the Philistines for forty years" (Judg. 13:1). Not one of the judges was able to subdue them, let alone win a decisive victory over them. Even though Shamgar "slew six hundred Philistines with an ox-goad" (Judg. 3:31), this was evidently not a severe enough defeat to be considered taking vengeance against them, for Samson was to be "the first to deliver Israel from the Philistines" (Judg. 13:5). He, at last, would take vengeance for Israel, when he killed a huge number of them, including "all the lords of the Philistines" (Judg. 16:27). Note that our verse is careful to say that Dan shall "judge" his people (OJPS); he will be a judge, not a king. **As one of the tribes of Israel.** Perhaps rather "like Tribe [Number] One in Israel," the tribe of Judah, of whom we read, "Your hand shall be on the nape of your foes" (v. 8). Dan would similarly overcome his enemies.

17 A viper. The Hebrew name for this serpent is related to the serpent who "*strikes* at the heel" (3:15), but the verb is hollow and this noun is geminate. According to the Palestinian Talmud, this species is as thin as a hair, but the earth has been given permission to split before it. Samson is likened to a serpent here because he did not confront his enemies in battle like the other judges or the kings, but went forth against them as a lone individual, like the adder that comes forth from its den to attack passersby, or like that hair-thin

RASHBAM also in "the *rest* and the *inheritance* that the LORD your God is giving you" (Deut. 12:9). **He bent his shoulder to the burden.** To the yoke of the kings of Israel. **And became a toiling serf.** To give kings a tithe of his crops: "He will seize your choice fields and . . . take a tenth part of your grain" (1 Sam. 8:14–15). That is essentially the straightforward sense. But it is a tiding of wealth for the tribe of Issachar.

16 Dan shall govern his people. One who explains this passage as having to do with Samson has not understood the profound straightforward sense of it at all. Do you think Jacob's intention was to prophesy about some individual who fell into the hands of the Philistines, had his eyes gouged out, and died (along with the Philistines) in some gruesome way? God forbid. He is prophesying about the *tribe* of Dan, "the rear guard of all the divisions" (Num. 10:25). They were likewise "the rear guard [who] marched behind the Ark" in Josh. 6:9, for that was their station all through the time of Moses and of Joshua. They had to fight all the nations who were pursuing Israel, attempting to cut down all the stragglers. It was their job as well to take revenge on all the nations, for they were mighty warriors. So what Jacob is saying here is not that Dan would "govern" his people, but that he would "take just revenge" for them **as one of the tribes of Israel.** He would take revenge on their behalf and protect them from their pursuers. Compare how the verb in question is used in "the LORD will *vindicate* His people" (Deut. 32:36), where we are told explicitly what it means: "He'll avenge the blood of His servants, wreak vengeance on His foes" (Deut. 32:43). See also "He *works judgment* upon the nations" (Ps. 110:6).

17 Dan shall be a serpent by the road. The tribe of Dan will be a serpent by the road to kill the other nations. **So that his rider is thrown backward.** The enemy will fall before him.

IBN EZRA might, and had no desire to leave their homes and go to war: "Rejoice, O Zebulun, on your journeys, and Issachar, in your tents" (Deut. 33:18). They paid tribute to the king of Israel rather than go out to fight, and to other nations so they would not come to fight them.

16 Dan shall govern his people. An allusion to the fact that Dan would carry the standard of an entire division of Israelites, like a son of Rachel or Leah. As leader of "the division of Dan" (Num. 2:31), he was essentially the captain of all the sons of the maidservants.

17 Dan shall be a serpent by the road. Another metaphor for power. **A viper by the path.** "Viper" may be related to the verb in "they shall *strike* at your head" (3:15). This phrase, of course, is parallel to the first.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **16 Dan shall govern his people, as one of the tribes of Israel.** He shall govern his own people but not all the tribes (Abarbanel).

17 Dan shall be a serpent by the road. Dan led the final division of the Israelites in the wilderness; in the land too, as we know from the expression "from Dan to Beer-sheba" (e.g., Judg. 20:1), Dan was on the frontier and bore the brunt of enemy attacks, preventing them from crossing into Israelite territory (Bekhor Shor). It was also Dan who "marched behind the Ark" in Josh. 6:9, when the Israelites crossed the Jordan (Hizkuni). Like a serpent—but not like a lion (Abarbanel).

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NJPS That bites the horse's heels
So that his rider is thrown backward.
[18]I wait for Your deliverance, O LORD!
[19]Gad shall be raided by raiders,
But he shall raid at their heels.

OJPS that biteth the horse's heels,
so that his rider falleth backward.
[18]I wait for Thy salvation, O LORD.
[19]Gad, a troop shall troop upon him;
but he shall troop upon their heel.

הַנֹּשֵׁךְ עִקְבֵי־סוּס
וַיִּפֹּל רֹכְבוֹ אָחוֹר׃
18 לִישׁוּעָתְךָ קִוִּיתִי יְהוָה׃
19 גָּד גְּדוּד יְגוּדֶנּוּ חמישי
וְהוּא יָגֻד עָקֵב׃ ס

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why does Dan, unlike any of the other tribes, evoke the exclamation "I wait for Your deliverance, O LORD!" (v. 18)?

RASHI is being compared to a serpent biting a horse's heels. **So that his rider is thrown backward.** Though the rider himself was untouched. Compare what we read of Samson: "He embraced the two middle pillars that the temple rested upon, one with his right arm and one with his left, and leaned against them" (Judg. 16:29); everyone on the roof of the temple died, though he never touched them. Onkelos translates our word as "adder," a particular kind of serpent for whose bite there is no cure.

18 I wait for Your deliverance, O LORD! Here he prophesies that the Philistines will gouge out Samson's eyes, and that he will eventually pray, "O Lord GOD! Please remember me, and give me strength just this once, O God, to take revenge of the Philistines, if only for one of my two eyes" (Judg. 16:28).

19 Gad shall be raided by raiders. Rather, "Gad shall raid him like raiders." The raiders will come *from* Gad, crossing the Jordan with their brothers to campaign until the land is conquered. Though the verb has only one ד, it is indeed from the same root as the noun, which has two. Menahem certainly classifies it this way. It is common with two-letter roots like this one that the second letter is doubled to produce the noun form, though it appears only once in the verb form. For similar examples, compare Prov. 26:2 and Job 7:4; Judg. 5:27 and Ps. 91:6. (In the Hiphil and Hitpael forms, the doubling is found in verbs too.) **But he shall raid at their heels.** That is, Gad's raiders shall turn on their heels

KIMHI **18 I wait for Your deliverance, O LORD!** Jacob points out that the actual source of Samson's great deeds would be the Lord. But some think he is begging the Lord for revenge after the Philistines gouge out Samson's eyes. And this indeed happened: "Those who were slain by him as he died outnumbered those who had been slain by him when he lived" (Judg. 16:30).

19 Gad shall be raided by raiders, but he shall raid at their heels. A reference to the war against the Hagrites; see 1 Chronicles 5.

NAHMANIDES serpent, of which travelers are completely unaware. **That bites the horse's heels.** These heels are an allusion to "the two middle pillars that the temple rested upon" (Judg. 16:29). **So that his rider is thrown backward.** The "three thousand men and women on the roof watching Samson dance" (Judg. 16:27) are the rider who is thrown backward when the serpent bites the horse's heels. For the horse rears its head and its front legs and the rider falls off.

18 I wait for Your deliverance, O LORD! There was none among all the judges of Israel who fell into the hands of his enemies but for this "serpent," Samson: "The LORD would be with the chieftain and would save them from their enemies during the chieftain's lifetime" (Judg. 2:18). And Samson was the last of the judges, for Samuel was a prophet—he did not fight for them. And it was in Samuel's time that the kings began to reign. When Jacob prophetically saw that deliverance ceased with Samson, he said, "I wait for *Your* deliverance, O LORD!—not for deliverance by a serpent or a viper. I wish to be delivered by You, not by a judge. For Your deliverance is eternal."

19 Gad shall be raided by raiders. Despite Rashi and Onkelos, the translations are correct here; the same root is found in "for a people to come to *attack* us" (Hab. 3:16). Gad will constantly be attacked and will always be fighting. **But he shall raid at their heels.** He will overcome them and pursue them, and they will "turn back because of their frustration" (Ps. 70:4). Jacob is therefore praising them for their valor and their victories over all who attack them. It is like what Moses said about them: "Blessed be He who enlarges Gad! Poised is he like a lion" (Deut. 33:20). Because they inherited a broad, extremely large area on the east side of the Jordan, their wicked Ammonite and Moabite neighbors were constantly raiding them, claiming their territory and attacking them. But Gad is like a lion poised

RASHBAM **18 I wait for Your deliverance, O LORD!** Rather, "your" deliverance, Dan. I hope in the Lord, that He will deliver you and exalt you above your enemies.

19 Gad shall be raided by raiders. Rather, "Gad is a troop." Israel will troop after him when they fight in the wars of Joshua: "You must go as shock-troops,

IBN EZRA **18 I wait for Your deliverance, O LORD!** Since he "bites the horse's heels," he is afraid that the rider of the horse will cut off his head with his sword. That is why the prophet inserts this line, which should really be translated, "I wait for your deliverance by the LORD," "your" being addressed to Dan. Or it may even be that the noun here substitutes for the infinitive: I wait for the Lord to deliver you. Compare "May we shout for joy in your victory" (Ps. 20:6), where "your" refers to David or to his descendant, the Messiah. Samuel ha-Nagid thinks that "and he said" is missing; indeed, it does seem that this should have introduced our verse. But R. Isaac **[M]** thinks that when he prophetically saw his son Dan in the likeness of a serpent, Jacob called out to the Lord in fear, "I wait for Your deliverance, O LORD!"

19 Gad shall be raided by raiders, but he shall raid at their heels. He prophesies that "a troop shall troop" upon Gad, but that eventually he will defeat them. For the

[M] It is not clear to whom Ibn Ezra is referring; see his second comment to Lev. 5:7.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **18 I wait for Your deliverance, O LORD!** Rather, for "your" deliverance, Dan. As long as the Holy One delivers you, Israel has nothing to fear—you will keep the border securely bolted (Bekhor Shor). The prophet saw what would end up happening to Samson and tried to prevent it. I think that is why the angel was sent to tell Manoah and his wife that Samson must be a nazirite "from the womb on" (Judg. 13:5) and abstain from alcohol. Lust was to be Samson's downfall, and drinking makes one extremely susceptible to lust. But even this did not help Samson escape his fate (Gersonides). Jacob is saying, "I wait for *Your* deliverance, O Lord, open and obvious—not a deliverance like that of Samson." Or possibly Dan himself is saying that he waits for deliverance from the Lord. He can expect no help from the other tribes because he is always protecting them by bringing up the rear (Abarbanel).

19 Gad shall be raided by raiders. Rather, "a troop shall troop along with him" (compare OJPS)—Reuben and the half tribe of Manasseh, who will troop across with him into the land (Bekhor Shor). This incident may have already happened, or it may be yet to happen. As Ibn Ezra remarks, we do not know everything that befell our ancestors (Gersonides). Old Jacob has been making all these

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NJPS [20]Asher's bread shall be rich,
And he shall yield royal dainties.
[21]Naphtali is a hind let loose,
Which yields lovely fawns.

OJPS [20]As for Asher, his bread shall be fat,
and he shall yield royal dainties.
[21]Naphtali is a hind let loose:
he giveth goodly words.

20 מֵאָשֵׁר שְׁמֵנָה לַחְמּוֹ
וְהוּא יִתֵּן מַעֲדַנֵּי־מֶלֶךְ׃ ס
21 נַפְתָּלִי אַיָּלָה שְׁלֻחָה
הַנֹּתֵן אִמְרֵי־שָׁפֶר׃ ס

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why are Gad (v. 19) and Asher (v. 20) mentioned before Naphtali, when Dan and Naphtali were born before Gad and Asher? ✦ What does calling Naphtali "a hind let loose" (v. 21) have to do with the "goodly words" (OJPS) that the rest of the verse invokes?

RASHI and return to their own holdings on the east bank of the Jordan—and no one will interfere. "Heel" here refers to doubling back on their own tracks, as the word is used in "Your *tracks* could not be seen" (Ps. 77:20); "Go follow the *tracks* of the sheep" (Song 1:8)—their "traces," as we would say in French.

20 Asher's bread shall be rich. The bread that comes "from Asher" (as the Hebrew literally says) will be rich, for olives will be abundant in his portion, and it will flow with oil like a fountain. Moses blessed him the same way: "Most blessed of sons be Asher; may he be the favorite of his brothers, may he dip his foot in oil" (Deut. 33:24). See the story on B. Men. 85b. **[Q]**

21 Naphtali is a hind let loose. This refers to the Valley of Ginosar, which ripens its fruits as rapidly as a hind "let loose" to run. **Which yields lovely fawns.** "Goodly words" (OJPS), as Onkelos translates—words of thanks and blessing for the fruits of the land. Another reading: It is a prophecy about the war with Sisera, when Deborah told Barak, "Take with you ten thousand men of Naphtali and Zebulun" (Judg. 4:6). They marched so expeditiously that they were indeed like a hind "let loose." That very word is used in the description of the battle: "*rushing* after him into the valley" (Judg. 5:15). It is through them that "Deborah and Barak son of Abinoam sang" (Judg. 5:1) the "goodly words" of that

[Q] See Rashi's comment to Deut. 33:24.

KIMHI **20 Asher's bread shall be rich.** Literally "*from* Asher" the bread—the food resources—shall be rich. Some of Asher's land will provide such riches, not all of it.

21 Naphtali is a hind let loose. A (feminine) hind because the story of Barak, to which this refers, is really the story of Deborah. **Which yields lovely fawns.** Rather, "goodly words" (OJPS)—the words of the Song of Deborah, where this story is told. **[F]**

[F] See Judges 5.

NAHMANIDES over its prey. He "is not dismayed by their cries nor cowed by their noise" (Isa. 31:4). I learned this beautiful interpretation from Tractate Sotah of the Palestinian Talmud. The prophet may be alluding specifically to the war fought by Jephthah the Gileadite against the Ammonites, for the Gadites took possession of all the cities of Gilead and half the territory of the Ammonites. So the Ammonites were always fighting with the inhabitants of Gilead. But Jephthah merely "crossed over to the Ammonites" (Judg. 11:32) and "utterly routed them" (Judg. 11:33). The whole episode was a great miracle, which the prophet mentions here just as he did the exploits of Samson.

21 Naphtali is a hind let loose. More precisely, a hind that is "sent off." It is a custom for rulers to send deer to each other; that is the topic of this verse. For deer that are born in the land of the king of the north are raised in the palaces of the king of the south. A message would be tied to the deer's horns and it would run back to its original home. That is how they would send messages. **Which yields lovely fawns.** Rather, "goodly words" (OJPS)—the good news brought by the deer. All this is well known; in Tractate Shevi'it of the Palestinian Talmud the story is told of such deer, their antlers plated with

RASHBAM warriors all, at the head of your Israelite kinsmen" (Deut. 3:18). But on the way home from the war Gad would follow up the rear. That is how it is done. Those who go first when they march out to war come last when they return, to protect the tribes from battle, making sure no enemies pursue them.

20 Asher's bread shall be rich. For they would bring olive oil "from Asher" (as the Hebrew literally says) so they could sauté their food. Moses too said of Asher, "May he be the favorite of his brother [Israelites], for he dips his foot in oil" (Deut. 33:24). **And he shall yield royal dainties.** The kings of Israel assessed his taxes in oil—for anointing, and to soften the skin (see 18:12 and B. Men 86a).

21 A hind let loose. They were warriors swift as hinds: "swift as gazelles upon the mountains" (1 Chron. 12:9). **Which yields lovely fawns.** Rather, which yields "trumpeted words." When they return from battle,

IBN EZRA verb, see "a people to come to *attack* us" (Hab. 3:16). The root is geminate, though with the vowel *u* rather than *o*. We today no longer know all the hardships that our ancestors had to go through.

20 Asher's bread shall be rich. NJPS follows those who think the מ in front of Asher's name does not signify anything. I believe it is more correct to take it literally: "from Asher," that is, from the land of Asher will come bread and oil. As Moses said, "May he dip his foot in oil" (Deut. 33:24). Note that "bread," usually a masculine word in Hebrew, is treated here as grammatically feminine. You will find the same with such common words as "house," "place," "hand," "fire," "eye," "wind," "earth," "box," and "people." **And he shall yield royal dainties.** This is self-explanatory.

21 Naphtali is a hind let loose. More precisely, "sent off" like a gift. **Which yields lovely fawns.** Rather, the "goodly words" that will be spoken by the recipient

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS predictions as literarily beautiful as he could: *yehudah yodukha, dan yadin*, and so forth. But for sheer gadgudosity, this time he has totally outdone himself, repeating the same sound four times with four different meanings (Abarbanel). **But he shall raid at their heels.** He shall *return* at their heels to his home and his land, whole and complete, with the full troop (Bekhor Shor).

20 Asher's bread shall be rich. Rather, "his [Gad's] bread shall be richer *than* Asher's," for his land is even better than Asher's. As Num. 32:1 reminds us, Gad's land was "a region suitable for cattle" (Bekhor Shor). Since v. 19 is not a blessing, this was the blessing offered to Gad. Another reading: Gad's bread will be rich from the bounty of Asher just as the bread of all the other tribes will be (Hizkuni). **And he shall yield royal dainties.** Gad's land is not better than Asher's because Asher's land is bad. On the contrary, your land is better than Asher's—and he, Asher, shall yield royal dainties! (Bekhor Shor). Gad's land is better, for Asher's did not produce wheat; so Gad will "yield royal dainties" to Asher (Abarbanel).

21 Naphtali is a hind let loose. The Naphtalites were renowned for their swift running (Bekhor Shor). Another possible reading of the phrase: "a terebinth sending forth shoots"; see Isa. 16:8 and 61:3 for these uses of the words (Hizkuni). The metaphor here is one of speed, a reference to the speed with which Barak son of Abinoam, of the tribe of Naphtali, heeded the call of Deborah to fight with Sisera—who had 900 iron chariots—with just a small force (Gersonides). **Which yields lovely fawns.** Rather, the "goodly words" reporting the

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NJPS [22]Joseph is a wild ass,
A wild ass by a spring
—Wild colts on a hillside.

OJPS [22]Joseph is a fruitful vine,
a fruitful vine by a fountain;
its branches run over the wall.

22 בֵּן פֹּרָת יוֹסֵף
בֵּן פֹּרָת עֲלֵי־עָיִן
בָּנוֹת צָעֲדָה עֲלֵי־שׁוּר׃

RASHI song. Our Sages connect the phrase with the day of Jacob's burial, when Esau argued that the cave was his and Naphtali ran back to Egypt to fetch the deed (see B. Sot. 13a). Onkelos, who translates the beginning of the verse to say that Naphtali's "lot fell" on a good land, understands the "goodly words" to be beautiful words of thanks.

22 Joseph is a wild ass. Rather, "a charming man"; it is related to Aramaic *apirion* ("palanquin"), which King Shapur uses metaphorically in praise of R. Simeon at the end of Tractate Bava Metzia. **A wild ass by a spring.** Rather, "by the eye." His charm is evident to the eye. **Wild colts on a hillside.** Rather, "girls marched in order to look." The Egyptian girls walked along the wall to gaze on Joseph's beauty. "Girls" is plural, but "march" is singular; each and every one of them found a place where she could look at him. "Look" here is related to the verb in "what I *behold* will not be soon" (Num. 24:17). There are many midrashim about this phrase; the explanation I have given is intended to settle the meaning of the words in context. Some technical details: The ת of *porat* ("charm") is simply stylistic; for a comparable example, see "as *regards* men" (Eccles. 3:18). In "to look," the preposition "to" must be understood. The poetic preposition "on" here is used in the sense of "concerning, for the purpose." Onkelos, however, translates our phrase to say that "two tribes will come forth from his daughters," using "daughters" as a reference to the daughters of Zelophehad, of the tribe of Manasseh, who took their portions on both sides of the Jordan. **[R]** Some midrashim explain the verse as follows: When Esau was approaching Jacob, the other mothers all walked in front of their children to bow down to him. But "Joseph and Rachel came forward and bowed low" (33:7). Joseph thought, "This wicked man is so arrogant! What if he casts his eyes on my mother?" He went in front of

[R] See Numbers 27 and 36.

KIMHI **22 Joseph is a wild ass.** Rather, "a fruitful vine" (OJPS). He will be "like a tree planted beside streams of water, which yields its fruit in season, whose foliage never fades" (Ps. 1:3).

NAHMANIDES silver, that were sent to North Africa and kept there for 13 years; but the moment they were released they returned. In our case, the metaphor is that Naphtali would be so happy and contented that it would be good news for all Israel. For its land produced an abundance of fruit, as our Sages say about the Valley of Ginosar.

22 Joseph is a wild ass. Rashi's explanation is extremely far-fetched. Such words in the Talmud—Greek or Persian or whatnot—are completely unrelated to Hebrew. Even if Rashi were correct, the words he cites are about blessing and praise, not "charm." In any case, the ן there is a root letter, not a suffix. So either he is "a fruitful son" (so Onkelos) or, as the grammarians explain, he is "a fruitful vine" (OJPS). If *ben* means "bough" here, as in "the *stem* you have taken as Your own" (Ps. 80:16), Joseph would be a plant with many branches. But in my view *ben* is to be taken literally as "son." Joseph is a son who is like the branches of a tree planted by "a spring whose waters do not fail" (Isa. 58:11). Note that *ben* is vocalized with a *tsere*; it is not in construct but follows the same syntax as the surrounding blessings. Naphtali is a hind; Benjamin is a wolf; Joseph is a (fruitful) son. If he were a son *of* the boughs, the vowel would have to be a *segol*. "Son" here is of course also used affectionately, as it was of Judah in v. 9. **Wild colts on a hillside.** Rather, "daughters" (as the Hebrew literally says)—daughters produced by the son—who "runs [them] over the wall" (compare OJPS). They run over the sky-high walls; the branches that come forth from the (larger) bough are likened here to its daughters. It is an extension of the "fruitful son" metaphor. One must interpret this blessing of Jacob to refer to the two tribes that branched out from him (thus "fruitful" and "daughters"). But since Levi is included here, and the tribes of Israel numbered only 12, the two separate tribes that would

RASHBAM they employ their swiftness to herald the good news of victory with blasts of the shofar. And note "Zebulun is a people that mocked at death, Naphtali—on the open heights" (Judg. 5:18). They run "on the open heights" as gazelles do.

22 Joseph is a wild ass, a wild ass by a spring. Rather, "A fruitful vine is Joseph, a fruitful vine above the eye" (compare OJPS). This verse is a classic example of staircase parallelism, where the first phrase is interrupted by the name of the person who is the subject; the second phrase returns to the beginning of the first and completes it. Compare "Your right hand, O LORD, glorious in power, Your right hand, O LORD, shatters the foe!" (Exod. 15:6); "Surely, Your enemies, O LORD, surely, Your enemies perish" (Ps. 92:10); "The ocean sounds, O LORD, the ocean sounds its thunder" (Ps. 93:3); "How long shall the wicked, O LORD, how long shall the wicked exult" (Ps. 94:3); "Utter futility!—said Koheleth—Utter futility! All is futile!" (Eccles. 1:2). Here too, "A fruitful vine is Joseph." And where does this vine grow? "A fruitful vine that grows above the eye," so that one must look up to see its beauty and stature. **Wild colts on a hillside.** Rather, "[Egyptian] girls march to

IBN EZRA of the gift. Since a hind is female, some think the first phrase is an allusion to Deborah, which would mean the "goodly words" would allude to the song Barak sang with Deborah in Judges 5; note that Barak was from "Kedesh in Naphtali" (Judg. 4:6).

22 Joseph is a wild ass. Rather, "a fruitful bough" (compare OJPS), and see "the stem you have taken as Your own" (Ps. 80:16), where the "stem" is *ben*, as in our verse. The adjective, grammatically, is a Qal feminine participle; these appear in two forms, with ת and with ה. For the ה form of our word, compare "Your wife shall be like a *fruitful* vine" (Ps. 128:3). Some connect it with the word in "it became a vine, produced branches, and sent out *boughs*" (Ezek. 17:6). Alternatively, ת simply replaces ה, as sometimes happens; compare "it shall *revert* to the prince" (Ezek. 46:17). **A wild ass by a spring.** He repeats "a fruitful bough" (see my previous comment), as those who express themselves in the holy tongue do. Compare the repetition in "Surely, Your enemies, O LORD, surely, Your enemies perish"

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS news of victories, which the swift-running Naphtalites were always the first to bring (Bekhor Shor). Rather, "lovely *branches*"; again, see Isa. 17:6. His land would be planted with beautiful trees producing luscious fruit (Hizkuni). Some say Naphtali's land produced the earliest crops, so the "goodly words" would be the declaration of the first fruits in Deuteronomy 26 (Abarbanel).

22 Joseph. The verses about Joseph pose extreme difficulties of understanding; the commentators have exhausted themselves in searching for the key to their interpretation. But I will give you my opinion (Abarbanel). **A wild ass by a spring—wild colts on a hillside.** Rather, the "fountain" would "run its branches over the wall" (compare OJPS) by watering them so well (Bekhor Shor). It is the

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NJPS [23]Archers bitterly assailed him;
They shot at him and harried him.
[24]Yet his bow stayed taut,
And his arms were made firm

OJPS [23]The archers have dealt bitterly with him,
and shot at him, and hated him;
[24]But his bow abode firm,
and the arms of his hands were made supple,

23 וַיְמָרְרֻהוּ וְרֹבּוּ
וַיִּשְׂטְמֻהוּ בַּעֲלֵי חִצִּים׃
24 וַתֵּשֶׁב בְּאֵיתָן קַשְׁתּוֹ
וַיָּפֹזּוּ זְרֹעֵי יָדָיו

RASHI her and stretched himself to his full height to conceal her. That is what his father is praising him for here: "You are a fruitful son"—you made yourself grow larger, Joseph—"against the eye" of Esau. That is how you earned your greatness. "The girls marched along the wall" to gaze at you when you went forth to rule over Egypt. The Sages have further interpreted the "eye" of our verse to say that the Evil Eye would have no power over the descendants of Joseph. Note that when Jacob blesses Ephraim and Manasseh, he blesses them that "they be teeming multitudes" (48:16)—like fish, over which the Evil Eye has no power.

23 Archers. People with tongues like arrows. But Onkelos understands *ḥetz* not as "arrow" but as "half"—those who would "divide" the inheritance with him. **They shot at him and harried him.** Note that this is the beginning of the verse in Hebrew, continuing the previous verse, and that the translations also reverse these two verbs. Potiphar and his wife "harried" him by jailing him; the same verb is used in "they *made* life *bitter* for them" (Exod. 1:14). Meanwhile, his brothers "made themselves his enemies" (the verb is not Qal—"they contended with him"—but Niphal). The Qal form would also be necessary if the verb meant "shoot." **[S]** For the form of the verb (with a different root), compare "*Moan*, you coastland dwellers" (Isa. 23:2). It is a reflexive form, not transitive. This is exactly how Onkelos translates it: "They took their [own] vengeance on him."

24 Yet his bow stayed taut. The translations are correct. "His bow" here is metaphoric for "his strength." **And his arms were made firm.** Rather, "his arms were made

[S] See Special Topics, "Biblical Hebrew."

KIMHI **23 Archers bitterly assailed him.** Jacob cannot have said this about Joseph's brothers when he was blessing them, even if he did have to speak ill of Reuben (to explain why he was losing the birthright) and of Simeon and Levi (to explain why they had to be scattered). It is about Potiphar and his wife and his household, who "dealt bitterly with him" (OJPS) by jailing him for more than two years.

24 And his arms were made firm. So he could give his enemies what they deserved. **There, the Shepherd, the Rock of Israel.** Rather, "*from* there"—from the glory given to

NAHMANIDES come from Joseph could not be mentioned explicitly, only hinted at. Just so, in Deuteronomy Moses likens Joseph to a bull or ox with two horns, each of them one of the two tribes he would produce. But since Simeon is not mentioned in that chapter, he could explicitly say there, "These are the myriads of Ephraim, those are the thousands of Manasseh" (Deut. 33:17).

24 By the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob. See the comments of Rashi and Ibn Ezra to this verse. According to the Way of Truth, this blessing resembles the blessing

RASHBAM look." It is parallel to "above the eye." For this meaning of the word, compare "As I *see* them from the mountain tops" (Num. 23:9). The Egyptian girls would walk past to see him—like Potiphar's wife and her friends.

23 Archers bitterly assailed him. Because Potiphar's wife and the others had their eyes on him, "archers" assailed him and threw him in prison. **They shot at him and harried him.** For the metaphor of Potiphar's wife's words as arrows being shot at him, compare "they bend their tongues like bows" (Jer. 9:2). Note the *dagesh* in "they shot"; it is a geminate root, parallel to "archers."

24 Yet his bow stayed taut. The arbalest is made from a strong piece of wood; only a powerful archer can bend his bow arm close enough to his body to shoot the arrow far. **[H]** If he is weak, he simply cannot pull the string. That is what our passage is talking about. The Egyptians shot "arrows" at him, put him in jail, and "his feet were subjected to fetters" (Ps. 105:18), yet he came forth and reigned over them, for his bow was stronger than theirs, and *he* put *them* in prison: "to bind his princes at his pleasure" (Ps. 105:22). **And his arms were made firm.** Rather, his arms "bent"—they "were made supple" (OJPS) as he bent the powerful bow: "my arms can bend a bow of bronze" (Ps. 18:35). That verse uses a

[H] Rashbam seems to be confusing the arbalest—a crossbow that is bent mechanically—with the longbow, bent by pulling it with the arms.

IBN EZRA (Ps. 92:10). Such a repetition implies that this will happen over and over again. **Wild colts on a hillside.** Rather, "its branches" (OJPS)—the branches that are brought forth by Joseph, the "fruitful bough"—each (the verb is singular) "run over the wall" (OJPS). By running "over" is meant that they grow high above the fortified walls. For the combination of plural subject and singular verb done by each, compare "Dead flies turn the perfumer's ointment fetid and putrid" (Eccles. 10:1).

23 Archers bitterly assailed him. Samuel ha-Nagid says that assailing him "bitterly" really means they targeted his gallbladder. Notice that "his bowmen surrounded me" (Job 16:13) is followed by "he spilled my *bile* onto the ground." For the "archers," compare "Summon archers against Babylon, all who draw the bow!" (Jer. 50:29). **They shot at him.** After targeting him. **And harried him.** This must have occurred *before* they "targeted" him. Treat is as if it said that they "had harried him." This alludes to his brothers selling him.

24 Yet his bow stayed taut. More literally, "his bow stayed in a firm [place]." **And his arms were made firm.** Presumably related to "leaping" of 2 Sam. 6:16, here with the sense that his arms "exerted" themselves. Some relate the word to *paz* ("gold"), but that makes

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS branches that would "run over the wall," as OJPS correctly translates; the verb is a third-person feminine plural, as in Isa. 59:12, "Our guilt *testifies* against us" (Hizkuni). "Fruitful" (as it must mean) is repeated twice, first to allude to Joseph's two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, and second to allude to his two outstanding qualities: one, his overcoming his sexual desire when his master's wife asked for him (yet he will be "fruitful" nonetheless), and two, his generosity in supporting his father and brothers. But I have seen *porat* interpreted as *tipheret*, e.g., the beautiful Rachel, making *ben porat* a poetic way of saying "Rachel's son" (Abarbanel). Just as the branches cannot be seen until they "run over the wall," Joseph's very existence was invisible to Jacob until suddenly he discovered it (Sforno).

23 Archers bitterly assailed him. Among them the chief cupbearer, who in 41:12 calls Joseph "a boy," "a Hebrew," and "a slave" (Sforno).

24 The Shepherd, the Rock of Israel. The Messiah son of Joseph, the leader who will begin the redemption before the Davidic

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NJPS By the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob—
There, the Shepherd, the Rock of Israel—
25The God of your father who helps you,
And Shaddai who blesses you
With blessings of heaven above,

OJPS by the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob,
from thence, from the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel,
25Even by the God of thy father, who shall help thee,
and by the Almighty, who shall bless thee,
with blessings of heaven above,

מִידֵי֙ אֲבִ֣יר יַעֲקֹ֔ב
מִשָּׁ֖ם רֹ֣עֶה אֶ֔בֶן יִשְׂרָאֵ֑ל׃
25 מֵאֵ֤ל אָבִיךָ֙ וְיַעְזְרֶ֔ךָּ
וְאֵ֥ת שַׁדַּ֖י וִיבָרְכֶ֑ךָּ
בִּרְכֹ֤ת שָׁמַ֙יִם֙ מֵעָ֔ל

RASHI gold," a reference to Pharaoh's ring being placed on his finger. **[T]** For this term for gold, see "*refined* gold" (1 Kings 10:18). **By the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob.** In fact, this came to him not through Pharaoh's hands but through those of the Holy One. **There, the Shepherd, the Rock of Israel.** Rather, "*from* there" (compare OJPS) he rose to become "the shepherd of the rock of Israel"—his father, Jacob. As in Zechariah's reference to "that excellent stone" (Zech. 4:7), "rock" here is a reference to kingship. Onkelos too says that "his arms were made gold," but understands the rest as a reference to Joseph's prophetic dreams; he takes *even* ("rock") as a shorthand combination of *av-ben* ("fathers and sons"). He adds that this was Joseph's reward for keeping the Torah in secret—an addition that has no basis in the Hebrew. The Sages read the verse midrashically: "His 'bow' stayed taut," yet he conquered his desire for his master's wife (calling it a bow because the seed shoots like arrows); "his arms were made firm" implies that his seed came forth from between his fingers instead, due to "the Mighty One of Jacob," the image of his father, Jacob, that appeared to him when he was about to give in. See B. Sot. 36b.

25 The God of your father who helps you. Literally, "it [all this, just described] is from the God of your father, and He helps you." **And Shaddai.** Literally, "and *with* **[T]** See 41:42.

KIMHI Joseph by the Holy One, Joseph was able to shepherd all Israel, likened to a rock for its strength (or because Israel is the essence on which the world is built).

25 Blessings of the deep that couches below. Moses too invokes "the deep that couches below" (Deut. 33:13), a reference to the water in the belly of the earth, as if it were

NAHMANIDES Jacob gave to "the lads" in 48:16. The Mighty One of Jacob is the God of Truth. The Bible never mentions "the Mighty One of Abraham" or "the Mighty One of Isaac," but only "the Mighty One of Jacob," or "the Mighty One of Israel" (Isa. 1:24), where Israel means Jacob. From Greatness and Might— the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob—"from there" comes the Shepherd, the Rock of Israel, that is, "that excellent stone" (Zech. 4:7) that was "the chief cornerstone" (Ps. 118:23) from the Lord. It is called "the Rock of Israel" in the same way that our Sages use the term "the Assembly of Israel." It is the stone that completes the All. As for "shepherd," the strength of Might goes up from the right hand of the Holy One: "He had rays coming forth from his hand; and there was the hiding of his power" (Hab. 3:4). The hiding is the hidden strength that arises from the place of his emanation, "the stock planted by Your right hand" (Ps. 80:16).

25 The God of your father. "The God who has been my shepherd from my birth to this day" (48:15). **And Shaddai who blesses you.** The sense of this blessing is that his

RASHBAM different verb, but both that and this are describing bending a bow. When Michal sees King David "leaping and whirling before the LORD" (2 Sam. 6:16), the first verb—the same as ours here—is not actually "leaping" but "flexing" his arms. **By the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob.** This victory, and his rulership, came to him from the Holy One. **There, the Shepherd, the Rock of Israel.** Rather, "from" there (OJPS). It was caused by the Holy One. "The Father, the Rock of Israel" (see below) is parallel to "the Mighty One of Jacob" in the first phrase; note that Doeg the Edomite is called "Saul's mighty shepherd" in 1 Sam. 21:8. The text implies that herdsmen must be mighty when it refers to bulls as "mighty ones of Bashan" (Ps. 22:13); see also "the herd of mighty bulls among the peoples" (Ps. 68:31). Jacob is saying, "It is the Holy One, 'who has been my shepherd from my birth to this day' [48:15], who has given you this power. Through your greatness he has sustained me in Egypt, making you the shepherd of the family of Israel." For Joseph provided for his father and his brothers. אבן here is not the word for "rock"; the ן is a suffix. This is a variant on אב, "father." For similar suffixes, see 31:42 and Exod. 8:13 (with ם) and Deut. 28:28 (with ן).

25 The God of your father. Again, the Hebrew says "*from* the God of your father" all this came to you, and He will **help you. Blessings of the deep.** For the deep rises

IBN EZRA no sense. These lines are saying that the archers harried him and worked in combination to spill his bile, but that his bow stayed firm and they were afraid of him and unable to overcome him, for his hands were strong. **By the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob.** Who is, of course, the Holy One. He knew Jacob's love for Joseph. **There.** Literally, "from there" (compare OJPS), which some interpret temporally: "from then on." But we do not find this meaning of the word anywhere else in the Bible. **The Shepherd, the Rock of Israel.** Rather, through the strength of the Holy One *Joseph* became the shepherd, the rock of Israel. And indeed "Joseph sustained his father" (47:12). The "rock" refers to the essence of something. Some take "the rock of Israel" to refer to Jacob's heart when he saw Joseph and "his heart went numb" (45:26), and *ro'eh* as "feeding" (not "shepherd"), for Jacob recovered and ate. But this interpretation is implausible, to say the least.

25 The God of your father. Literally, "by the God of your father" (compare OJPS). This phrase picks up from "by the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob" (v. 24). This strength comes to you "from" your father's God (as the Hebrew literally says); it is He **who helps you. And Shaddai who blesses you.** More precisely, "and by" Shaddai (see OJPS). The "from" of the first phrase is doing double duty; see my comment to "I did not make Myself known" (Exod. 6:3). It is parallelism again. But Saadia thinks Jacob is saying, "[I will ask] of the God of your father" that He bless you (and so forth). **With blessings of heaven.** Saadia takes our verse to mean, "[I asked of] the God of

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS Messiah brings it to fruition (Gersonides). Rather, "the Shepherd of 'Israel the rock'"—Israel, who survive among the nations as strong as a rock (Sforno).

25 The God of your father who helps you, and Shaddai who blesses you. Matching the two qualities for which he is praised in v. 22. The God of your father helps you for supporting your father; Shaddai blesses you for overcoming your desire (Abarbanel). **Blessings of the breast and womb.** It is the nature of how women grow that the breasts grow first. And of course the breasts fill with milk before the child is born (Bekhor Shor).

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NJPS Blessings of the deep that couches below,
Blessings of the breast and womb.
[26]The blessings of your father
Surpass the blessings of my ancestors,
To the utmost bounds of the eternal hills.

OJPS blessings of the deep that coucheth beneath,
blessings of the breasts, and of the womb.
[26]The blessings of thy father
are mighty beyond the blessings of my progenitors
unto the utmost bound of the everlasting hills;

בִּרְכֹ֣ת תְּהֹ֔ום רֹבֶ֖צֶת תָּ֑חַת
בִּרְכֹ֥ת שָׁדַ֖יִם וָרָֽחַם׃
[26] בִּרְכֹ֣ת אָבִ֔יךָ
גָּבְר֥וּ עַל־בִּרְכֹ֖ת הוֹרַ֑י
עַד־תַּאֲוַ֥ת גִּבְעֹ֖ת עוֹלָ֑ם

RASHI Shaddai" was your heart, when you did not heed your master's wife; and He **blesses you**. **Blessings of the breast and womb**. Blessings of father and mother. Those who father children and those who give birth to them will be blessed. The males will produce seed that can fertilize; the women will not miscarry. So it is not really "breast"; this is a word related to the Aramaic word used to translate "he shall be either stoned or *shot*" (Exod. 19:13). Again, their seed will shoot forth like arrows.

26 The blessings of your father surpass the blessings of my ancestors. The blessings with which the Holy One has blessed me have gone far beyond the blessings with which He blessed my ancestors or, more precisely, my "progenitors" (OJPS). For the Hebrew word, compare "A male has been *conceived*!" (Job 3:3). **To the utmost bounds of the eternal hills**. My blessings extend as far as the utmost bounds of the eternal hills, for He gave me the blessing of spreading out without limits, reaching the four corners of the earth: "You shall spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south" (28:14), which was not given either to Abraham or to Isaac. Abraham was told to "look out from where you are, to the north and south, to the east and west," but he was given only "all the land *that you see*" (13:14–15). And he was shown nothing but the land of Israel. As for Isaac, he was told, "I will assign all these lands to you and to your heirs, fulfilling the [limited] oath that I swore to your father Abraham" (26:3). That is why Isaiah promises to "let you enjoy the heritage of your father Jacob" (Isa. 58:14)—*not* "the heritage of your father Abraham" or of Isaac. The utmost "bounds" are the farthest limits; this word is related to the verb in "from Mount Hor *draw a line* to Lebo-hamath" (Num. 34:8) and "For your eastern boundary you shall *draw a line* from Hazar-enan to Shepham" (Num. 34:10); that is how Menahem explains it. Onkelos, however, translates as if this were the more commonly used word that means "craving," and takes "hills" metaphorically as a reference to someone great—like "the pillars of the earth" in 1 Sam. 2:8. So Onkelos takes the phrase to mean that Jacob's mother so desired the blessings that she forced him to get

KIMHI crouching there until it was time for it to come forth, whether through human effort or by means of rain and dew. His land would be so well watered that plants would be able to flourish even in times of no rain. **Blessings of the breast and womb**. These are parallel (metaphorically) to the heaven above and the deep below.

26 The blessings of your father. Our Sages link this to the blessings of the breast and womb, for all three give blessing to the child—the father, the mother, and the nursemaid. **Surpass the blessings of my ancestors**. A prophetic perfect. **To the utmost bounds of the eternal hills**. As long as the earth shall exist. For hills and mountains are the longest-lasting parts of the lower world. That is why they are invoked in "For the mountains may move and the hills be shaken, but my loyalty shall never move from you, nor My covenant of friendship be shaken" (Isa. 54:10).

NAHMANIDES help will come from "the Mighty One of Jacob" (v. 24), from the Compassion that shepherds the Rock of Israel, and from the God of his father (who earned His favor). His blessing will be with Shaddai, so he is blessed in heaven and on earth.

26 The blessings of your father surpass the blessings of my ancestors. With Jacob the whole edifice is complete. I have brought the explanation of these last three verses from *Sefer ha-Bahir*; the enlightened will understand.

RASHBAM up and waters the earth. **Blessings of the breast**. The breast will not shrivel, and the children will not die for want of milk. **And womb**. In the womb, too, the fetus will not die. The opposite is written as a curse: "Give them a womb that miscarries" and if it does not, "shriveled breasts!" (Hosea 9:14). It is like the rabbinic principle, "Not only this but also that." **[I]**

26 The blessings of your father surpass the blessings of my ancestors. The blessings of your father, Jacob—for the Holy One blessed me, when "the LORD was standing beside him" (28:13) and said, "You shall spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south" (28:14). A good inheritance, and one without limit, above all the mountains of the world. **To the utmost bounds of the eternal hills**. For "utmost bounds," see Num. 34:8 and 10. The blessing of Moses proves that "my ancestors" (*horai*) is really "my mountains," parallel to "the eternal hills": "With the best from the ancient mountains, and the bounty of hills

[I] It is not clear whether Rashbam is applying this principle, meant to explain expressions that seem to occur in the reverse of the logical order, to our verse, the Hosea verse, or both.

IBN EZRA your father" that He bless you with these blessings; in fact, it seems that the verb relevant to these blessings does not appear until "may they rest" of v. 26. **[N] Blessings of the deep that couches below**. As Moses said, "With the bounty of earth and its fullness" (Deut. 33:16). "Deep" is being treated as a feminine noun here, as in "The deep made it grow tall" (Ezek. 31:4). The blessings of heaven and of the deep are that the rains should fall from above onto his land, which would increase the waters in the springs and streams that are nourished by the aquifer that "couches" deep below. **Blessings of the breast and womb**. "Breast" here matches the heavens and "womb" the deep. This is a blessing that he should have many children. For the opposite, see "Give them a womb that miscarries, and shriveled breasts!" (Hosea 9:14).

26 The blessings of your father surpass the blessings of my ancestors. These blessings that I, your father, have given you are greater, for they combine with those given me by my ancestors—literally, those who "sired" me. Normally this root is used intransitively, but see the Hebrew of "She *conceived and bore* Miriam" (1 Chron. 4:17); "A male has been *conceived*!" (Job 3:3). **To the utmost bounds of the eternal hills**. For "bounds," see "you shall *draw a line*" (Num. 34:10). The implication is that these blessings should grow

[N] This is a plausible, but not certain, understanding of Ibn Ezra's cryptic comment.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **26 The blessings of your father surpass the blessings of my ancestors**. For the blessing did not go to Ishmael or to any of Abraham's sons by Keturah, nor to Isaac's son Esau—but *all* my sons are included in the blessing (Bekhor Shor). **To the utmost bounds of the eternal hills**. They will extend over all the earth—an exaggeration meant to describe blessing without

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NJPS May they rest on the head of Joseph,
On the brow of the elect of his brothers.
[27]Benjamin is a ravenous wolf;
In the morning he consumes the foe,
And in the evening he divides the spoil."
[28]All these were the tribes of Israel,

תִּהְיֶיןָ לְרֹאשׁ יוֹסֵף
וּלְקָדְקֹד נְזִיר אֶחָיו׃ פ
27 בִּנְיָמִין זְאֵב יִטְרָף ששי
בַּבֹּקֶר יֹאכַל עַד
וְלָעֶרֶב יְחַלֵּק שָׁלָל׃
28 כָּל־אֵלֶּה שִׁבְטֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל שְׁנֵים עָשָׂר

OJPS they shall be on the head of Joseph,
and on the crown of the head of the prince among his brethren.
[27]Benjamin is a wolf that raveneth;
in the morning he devoureth the prey,
and at even he divideth the spoil."
[28]All these are the twelve tribes of Israel,

RASHI them. **May they rest on the head of Joseph**. All these blessings. **The elect of his brothers**. Rather, "the nazirite of his brothers," the one who separated himself from them: "Instruct Aaron and his sons *to separate themselves from* the sacred donations" (Lev. 22:2); "*Turned* their backs" (Isa. 1:4).

27 Benjamin is a ravenous wolf. He prophesies here that the tribe of Benjamin will be raptors, a reference to "Let each of you *seize* a wife from among the girls of Shiloh" (Judg. 21:21) and to the story of the concubine in Gibeah. **[U]** He prophesied as well about Saul, the Benjaminite king who "waged war on every side against all his enemies: against the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, the Philistines, and the kings of Zobah; and wherever he turned he worsted them" (1 Sam. 14:47). **In the morning he consumes the foe**. More precisely, he consumes "plunder"; Onkelos uses an Aramaic word related to our Hebrew word when he translates "They gathered all the *spoil* and all the booty" (Num. 31:11). There is in fact another occurrence of a related word in the Bible itself; see "much spoil" of Isa. 33:23. He is saying here that Saul will be the beginning of the flourishing of Israel. **And in the evening he divides the spoil**. Even when their sun has set (by means of Nebuchadnezzar, who would exile them to Babylon), Benjaminites will divide the spoil—Mordecai and Esther, who came from the tribe of Benjamin. For King Ahasuerus said to Esther and Mordecai, "I have given Haman's property to Esther" (Esther 8:7). But Onkelos takes these last two phrases as a reference to the sacred foods consumed by the priests in the sanctuary, which was in the territory of Benjamin.

28 This is what their father said to them as he bade them farewell. Literally, as he "blessed them" (OJPS), though in fact he did not bless all of them, but rebuked some of them. So NJPS understands the sense. But could it be that he would not bless Reuben,

[U] See Judges 19.

KIMHI **27 Benjamin is a ravenous wolf**. Wolves are bolder than other animals in approaching human settlements. So too Benjamin would be bold in war. Among those who joined David at Ziklag were warriors who "were armed with the bow and could use both right hand and left hand to sling stones or shoot arrows with the bow; they were kinsmen of Saul from Benjamin" (1 Chron. 12:1–2). **In the morning he consumes the foe**. And thus is greater than the wolf, which attacks only in the evening.

28 All these were the tribes of Israel, twelve in number. Despite Joseph's being 2 tribes for the purpose of allocating the land. Levi was not a tribe in that regard, so there are still 12.

RASHBAM immemorial" (Deut. 33:15). **May they rest on the head of Joseph**. Those blessings. **The elect of his brothers**. The king over his brothers.

27 Benjamin is a ravenous wolf. This is a prophecy about Saul the Benjaminite, the first king of Israel—that he would inflict damage on all the surrounding nations: "wherever he turned he worsted [them]" (1 Sam. 14:47). And of course Benjamin was on the side of all the righteous kings of Judah who overcame the nations, as we find in the stories of Asa, Jehoshaphat, and Hezekiah. **[J] And in the evening he divides the spoil**. As is usual for wolves: "The wolf of the evening ravages them" (Jer. 5:6); "Her judges are wolves of the evening, they leave no bone until morning" (Zeph. 3:3).

28 Appropriate to him. Telling each his future fortune: "Come together that I may

[J] This would seem to be a scribal error for Amaziah; see 2 Chron. 14:7 and 15:2, 2 Chron. 17:17, and 2 Chron. 25:5 respectively.

IBN EZRA as tall as the hills. **The elect of his brothers**. Not "the elect," but "the crown"; this is a variant of the word "diadem."

27 Benjamin is a ravenous wolf. Another image referring to valiant might. You will find proof of Benjamin's valor in the story of the men of Gibeah. **[O] In the morning he consumes the foe**. Rather, as in Aramaic, "the plunder"; compare "Then shall indeed much *spoil* be divided" (Isa. 33:23). **And in the evening he divides the spoil**. He will divide the spoil he has taken among his children. Jeshua the Karaite considers "morning" an allusion to Saul defeating the Amalekites, at the beginning of the monarchy, and "evening" to their deliverance through Mordecai. **[P]** But all this is midrash. As for Onkelos, his view is well known. **[Q]**

28 This is what their father said to them as he bade them farewell. Rather, "this is what their father said to them, *and* he blessed them" (compare OJPS). He first spoke to them of the future, as recorded

[O] See Judges 20. **[P]** For Saul defeating King Agag of Amalek, see 1 Samuel 15; for Mordecai defeating "Haman son of Hammedatha the Agagite," see Esther. Both Saul and Mordecai were Benjaminites. **[Q]** See Rashi's comment.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS limit (Gersonides). To the far horizon on either side (Sforno). **The elect of his brothers**. Rather, "the nazirite among his brothers"—the one most able to resist sexual temptation, as Joseph did with his master's wife. Compare what Judah did when he met Tamar (in disguise) while traveling to Timnah: he turned aside to her by the road and said, "Here, let me sleep with you" (38:16). For the opposite extreme to Joseph, see Reuben and Bilhah (Gersonides). The point of all this is that Joseph is superior to his brothers by nature, but in a way that arouses jealousy in them—making him unfit for the kingship. A king must be loved by his people (Abarbanel). The phrase calls him "crowned" among his brothers, demonstrating that he is worthy of these blessings. Indeed, his descendant became the first of the judges, and after the Davidic kingdom split in two, another descendant of Joseph became the first king of the northern kingdom (Sforno).

27 Benjamin is a ravenous wolf. Seizing prey but not lingering over it, just as the kingship of Saul lasted only two and a half years; but David, descended from Judah, was like a lion, standing over his prey without fleeing (Bekhor Shor). **In the morning he consumes the foe**. No sooner does he go to war than he consumes the spoil of his foe (Gersonides). **And in the evening he divides the spoil**. Among the rest of his tribe or his people (Gersonides).

28 All these were the tribes of Israel, twelve in number. Ephraim and Manasseh were tribes only for the purpose of allocating the land. On Aaron's breastplate in Exod. 28:29, at Mounts Gerizim and Ebal in Deut. 27:12–13, when Joshua has 12 stones put in the Jordan

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NJPS twelve in number, and this is what their father said to them as he bade them farewell, addressing to each a parting word appropriate to him.

[29]Then he instructed them, saying to them, "I am about to be gathered to my kin. Bury me with my fathers in the cave which is in the field of Ephron the Hittite, [30]the cave which is in the field of Machpelah, facing Mamre, in the land of Canaan, the field that Abraham bought from Ephron

OJPS and this is it that their father spoke unto them and blessed them; every one according to his blessing he blessed them.

[29]And he charged them, and said unto them: "I am to be gathered unto my people; bury me with my fathers in the cave that is in the field of Ephron the Hittite, [30]in the cave that is in the field of Machpelah, which is before Mamre, in the land of Canaan, which Abraham bought with the field from Ephron the Hittite for a

וְזֹאת אֲשֶׁר־דִּבֶּר לָהֶם אֲבִיהֶם וַיְבָרֶךְ
אוֹתָם אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר כְּבִרְכָתוֹ בֵּרַךְ אֹתָם׃
29 וַיְצַו אוֹתָם וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם אֲנִי נֶאֱסָף
אֶל־עַמִּי קִבְרוּ אֹתִי אֶל־אֲבֹתָי אֶל-
הַמְּעָרָה אֲשֶׁר בִּשְׂדֵה עֶפְרֹן הַחִתִּי׃
30 בַּמְּעָרָה אֲשֶׁר בִּשְׂדֵה הַמַּכְפֵּלָה אֲשֶׁר
עַל־פְּנֵי־מַמְרֵא בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנַעַן אֲשֶׁר קָנָה
אַבְרָהָם אֶת־הַשָּׂדֶה מֵאֵת עֶפְרֹן הַחִתִּי

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Isn't it redundant for v. 28 to say (see OJPS) that Jacob "spoke" to them and "blessed" them? ✦ Isn't it tautological to say (see again OJPS) that he blessed each of them "according to his blessing"? ✦ Why must vv. 29–32 list so many different features identifying the cave of Machpelah?

RASHI Simeon, and Levi? No, indeed: "He blessed them." **Addressing to each a parting word appropriate to him.** Again the more literal translation is that he blessed each of them "according to his blessing" (OJPS)—according to the blessing that would fall to each of them. That would have been enough, but the text goes on to add once again that "he blessed them" (OJPS). One might think that the individual invocations giving Judah a lion's might, Benjamin the ravenousness of a wolf, and Naphtali the speed of a hind take something away from the others; but "he blessed them" all.

29 I am about to be gathered to my kin. For souls are "gathered" in to the place where they are stored away. "Gathering" in Hebrew can refer to entering a location: "You shall *bring it home*" (Deut. 22:2); "Nobody has *taken me indoors*" (Judg. 19:18). Even "the Feast of Ingathering at the end of the year, when you *gather in* the results of your work from the field" (Exod. 23:16) refers to bringing the harvest indoors to protect it from the rain; see similarly Lev. 23:39. So whenever the text tells us that the dead are "gathered," we understand that they are being "brought in." **With my fathers.** Literally "to" my fathers, but the translations have the correct sense of the expression.

RASHBAM tell you what is to befall you in days to come" (v. 1).

30 The field that Abraham bought from Ephron the Hittite for a burial site. So they cannot refuse to bury me.

IBN EZRA in our chapter, and afterward blessed them. The blessings are left unrecorded. **Addressing to each a parting word.** He blessed each of them with the blessing appropriate to him. **[R]** The Hebrew expression is similar to "each his own dream and each dream with its own meaning" (40:5).

29 Then he instructed them. He "commanded" them all to go along with Joseph to bury him.

[R] Literally, with the blessing "coming" to him. Others take this as a past tense verb and understand Ibn Ezra to be saying that the blessings did indeed come to pass.

NAHMANIDES **29 Bury me with my fathers in the cave.** See Rashi, who explains "to my fathers" but not the literal "to the cave" that follows it. Perhaps we are to understand that he means "Bury me [and take me up] to my fathers, to the cave," as he says in 47:30, "take me up from Egypt." And indeed "his sons *carried* him to the land of Canaan" (50:13), using the same Hebrew expression. But *el* is used in many different ways in Hebrew, so it certainly could mean both "*with* my fathers," as in "Do not marry a woman *with* her sister" (Lev. 18:18), and "*in* the cave," as in "Place the cover on top of the Ark, after depositing *into* the Ark the Pact that I will give you" (Exod. 25:21); "he is hiding *among* the baggage" (1 Sam. 10:22). For that matter, "Abraham buried his wife Sarah *in* the cave of the field of Machpelah" (23:19). As for Ibn Ezra's comment that he commanded them all to go along with Joseph to bury him, Jacob had no need to do that. He is commanding them now to bury him in the cave, just as he had made Joseph swear to do, being afraid that Pharaoh, thinking Joseph might linger in his homeland, would not give him permission to go. Don't forget that Joseph had to speak "to Pharaoh's court" (50:4) to beg their intervention in getting him permission, and that Pharaoh himself said, "as he made you promise on oath" (50:6). It was because of the oath that Pharaoh was willing to let him go.

30 The cave which is in the field of Machpelah. He emphasizes this because of the greatness of the place; they must make every effort to bury him there. **The field that Abraham bought from Ephron the Hittite for a burial site.** He makes known that Abraham instructed that this place be their permanent burial site forever. In 50:13, however, the implication is that with Jacob's burial the righteous Abraham's command has been fulfilled. **[I]** He bought the cave for the three of them and for no one else. That is why Joseph does not order that he himself be buried in the cave with his fathers. In the Mekilta of R. Simeon bar Yohai I have read the following: Said Joseph: "When you bring me up there, bury me wherever you like. I have received a tradition that I am not to be buried in my fathers' burial site, for no one is to be buried there but the three Patriarchs and three Matriarchs." And he quotes v. 31 here, as well as Jacob saying, "the grave which I made ready *for myself*" (50:5). In other words, "It stops with me."

[I] Nahmanides does not say what about 50:13 implies this.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS and at Gilgal in Joshua 4, and when Elijah builds 12 stones into the altar in 1 Kings 18, these 12 are the 12 tribes of Israel (Sforno). **Addressing to each a parting word appropriate to him.** Some people do not consider what Jacob said to Reuben, Simeon, and Levi blessings, and insist that, when our phrase says "he blessed them" (see OJPS), that was in addition to the predictions about their future given here. But I do not like that interpretation. Blessings too are statements about the future; if they did not come true, there would be no point in giving them. You must understand that informing someone about what would happen to him in the future—whether good or bad—*is* a blessing. This is how the Holy One watches over those who cleave to Him: by letting them know what is in store for them. If it is bad, they have a chance to try to avoid it; if good, to maximize it. Notice that part of Isaac's blessing for Esau was "you shall serve your brother" (27:40). See again part 4 of my *Wars of the Lord*, as well as my commentary to the book of Job (Gersonides).

29 I am about to be gathered to my kin. My soul will be with theirs in their eternal home (Abarbanel). **Bury me with my fathers.** Given that my soul is with theirs, my body should be with theirs as well (Abarbanel).

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NJPS the Hittite for a burial site—[31]there Abraham and his wife Sarah were buried; there Isaac and his wife Rebekah were buried; and there I buried Leah—[32]the field and the cave in it, bought from the Hittites." [33]When Jacob finished his instructions to his sons, he drew his feet into the bed and, breathing his last, he was gathered to his people.

50 Joseph flung himself upon his father's face and wept over him and kissed him. [2]Then Joseph ordered the physicians in his service to embalm his father, and the

לַאֲחֻזַּת־קָבֶר׃ [31] שָׁמָּה קָבְרוּ אֶת־אַבְרָהָם
וְאֵת שָׂרָה אִשְׁתּוֹ שָׁמָּה קָבְרוּ אֶת־יִצְחָק
וְאֵת רִבְקָה אִשְׁתּוֹ וְשָׁמָּה קָבַרְתִּי אֶת־
לֵאָה׃ [32] מִקְנֵה הַשָּׂדֶה וְהַמְּעָרָה אֲשֶׁר־בּוֹ
מֵאֵת בְּנֵי־חֵת׃ [33] וַיְכַל יַעֲקֹב לְצַוֹּת אֶת־
בָּנָיו וַיֶּאֱסֹף רַגְלָיו אֶל־הַמִּטָּה וַיִּגְוַע וַיֵּאָסֶף
אֶל־עַמָּיו׃

נ וַיִּפֹּל יוֹסֵף עַל־פְּנֵי אָבִיו וַיֵּבְךְּ
עָלָיו וַיִּשַּׁק־לוֹ׃ [2] וַיְצַו יוֹסֵף אֶת־עֲבָדָיו
אֶת־הָרֹפְאִים לַחֲנֹט אֶת־אָבִיו וַיַּחַנְטוּ

OJPS possession of a burying-place. [31]There they buried Abraham and Sarah his wife; there they buried Isaac and Rebekah his wife; and there I buried Leah. [32]The field and the cave that is therein, which was purchased from the children of Heth." [33]And when Jacob made an end of charging his sons, he gathered up his feet into the bed, and expired, and was gathered unto his people.

50 And Joseph fell upon his father's face, and wept upon him, and kissed him. [2]And Joseph commanded his servants the physicians to embalm his father. And the

RASHI **33 He drew his feet into the bed.** Again, note that the Hebrew literally says he "gathered" them up into the bed (OJPS). **Breathing his last, he was gathered to his people.** It does not say "he died," and indeed our Sages insist, "Our Patriarch Jacob did not die."

50:2 To embalm his father. The Hebrew verb implies fragrance, for this was done by compounding spices.

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ The text tells us that "breathing his last, he was gathered to his people" (v. 33)—but not that "he died." Why?

RASHBAM **33 He drew his feet into the bed.** Up to this point he had been sitting up (see 48:2 and 12). The text told us that to convey what love the Holy One had for Jacob, giving him strength until the moment he breathed his last.

50:2 To embalm his father. We understand the meaning of the Hebrew verb from context. Menahem connects it with the verb in "The green figs *form* on the fig tree, the vines in blossom give off fragrance" (Song 2:13).

IBN EZRA **33 He drew his feet into the bed.** Having originally sat up on the bed with his feet dangling over the side, as the Edomites do nowadays. **[S]** Ishmaelite beds **[T]** do not sit so high.

50:2 The physicians embalmed Israel. By dusting him with some kind of powder. It is possible, if somewhat implausible, that the Hebrew verb is related to "The fig tree *puts forth* its green figs" (Song 2:13).

[S] The Christians of Europe. **[T]** Those in Islamic lands.

KIMHI **50:1 Joseph flung himself upon his father's face.** As did all the brothers, but Joseph, as the highest ranking of them, did so first.

2 Embalm. This involves embalming the dead person with certain chemicals so that he does not decompose.

NAHMANIDES **31 There Isaac and his wife Rebekah were buried.** He does not say, "I buried them," since Esau was with him at their father's burial and he did not wish to mention that name now. And there was no point in specifying that "we buried Isaac" but "Rebekah was buried" (for Jacob was not present at his mother's burial). **There I buried Leah.** Perhaps indicating that he thereby claimed his own place in the cave. So Esau and his sons will not be able to complain that Esau was the first-born, the cave belongs to them, and therefore *he* should be the one who is buried with his fathers. For even though he had gone "to another land" (36:6), they would have brought him back from there just as Jacob's sons brought him back. But Jacob wanted to be buried with his holy ancestors and to be united with them in death. If Esau were buried there, Jacob could not be. Two families cannot share a single tomb. Again, that is what Jacob meant by invoking "the grave which I made ready for myself" (50:5)—he had dug it already to establish his claim. That is also why "chariots and horsemen went up with him" (50:9). He well knew the audacity of Esau and his sons. And he was right to be concerned, for we find in *Josippon* and other ancient chronicles that Zepho son of Eliphaz son of Esau quarreled so vehemently with them about it that fighting broke out. Joseph's side won, and he captured them, brought them to Egypt, and kept Zepho imprisoned there as long as he lived. But when Joseph died Zepho escaped to Campania, then became king in Rome and eventually over all of Italy. He was the first king of Rome and built the first and greatest of all the palaces ever built in Rome. Our Sages too describe Esau quarreling about the cave. **[J]**

33 Breathing his last. See Rashi's comment; the Sages, of course, point out that Jacob himself said, "I am about to die" (48:21). Either he himself did not realize that he would not die, or he did not want to brag about it. As for "When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead" (50:15), he was dead as far as they were concerned (or perhaps they knew nothing at all about his not dying). What this midrash is really about is that the souls of the righteous are "bound up in the bundle of life" (1 Sam. 25:29). For "ever does He protect him" (Deut. 33:12). The soul puts on its other "garment" so that it will not remain naked (as in the case of Jacob) or (with others) it is at least clothed at particular times. This matter can be understood by study of B. Shab. 152b and B. Ket 103b.

[J] See Rashi's comments to 49:21 and 50:5.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **33 He drew his feet into the bed.** He had been sitting on the bed with his feet on a footstool (Bekhor Shor). His feet were on the ground (Hizkuni). He drew in his feet, lay down, fell asleep, and his soul left him—painlessly and without agitation. It is just like someone who comes to speak with his friend and, when he has finished the conversation, takes his leave (Abarbanel).

50:2 The physicians in his service. Since Joseph was in charge of all the arrangements for the palace, the physicians who did the embalming (which was restricted to the kings) were also in his service (Abarbanel). **Embalming.** The related word used in Song 2:13 suggests this was done with oil from olives that, like the figs in that verse, were no more than one-third grown. Joseph was embalmed the same way (Bekhor Shor). Embalming involves removing the brain, the heart, the liver, and the digestive organs; anointing the body, inside and out, with balsam; and packing the intestines with spices (which are changed every day) to dry out the natural moisture of the body. All this preserves the body so that the dead person does not decay for a long time, but seems merely to be sleeping. Nonetheless, the flesh and the skin do decay little by little. Thus Joseph too was "embalmed" (50:26), but Exod. 13:19 tells us that Moses took with him only "the bones of Joseph" (Abarbanel).

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NJPS physicians embalmed Israel. [3]It required forty days, for such is the full period of embalming. The Egyptians bewailed him seventy days; [4]and when the wailing period was over, Joseph spoke to Pharaoh's court, saying, "Do me this favor, and lay this appeal before Pharaoh: [5]'My father made me swear, saying, "I am about to die. Be sure to bury me in the grave which I made ready for myself in the land of Canaan." Now, therefore, let me go up and bury my father; then I shall return.'" [6]And Pharaoh said, "Go up and bury your father, as he made you promise on oath."

[7]So Joseph went up to bury his father; and with him went up all the officials of Pharaoh, the senior members of his court, and all of Egypt's dignitaries, [8]together with all of Joseph's household, his brothers, and his father's household; only their children, their flocks, and their herds were left in the region of Goshen. [9]Chariots, too, and horsemen went up with him; it was a very large troop.

OJPS physicians embalmed Israel. [3]And forty days were fulfilled for him; for so are fulfilled the days of embalming. And the Egyptians wept for him threescore and ten days. [4]And when the days of weeping for him were past, Joseph spoke unto the house of Pharaoh, saying: "If now I have found favor in your eyes, speak, I pray you, in the ears of Pharaoh, saying: [5]My father made me swear, saying: Lo, I die; in my grave which I have digged for me in the land of Canaan, there shalt thou bury me. Now therefore let me go up, I pray thee, and bury my father, and I will come back." [6]And Pharaoh said: "Go up, and bury thy father, according as he made thee swear."

[7]And Joseph went up to bury his father; and with him went up all the servants of Pharaoh, the elders of his house, and all the elders of the land of Egypt, [8]and all the house of Joseph, and his brethren, and his father's house; only their little ones, and their flocks, and their herds, they left in the land of Goshen. [9]And there went up with him both chariots and horsemen; and it was a very great company.

הָרֹפְאִים אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל׃ 3 וַיִּמְלְאוּ־לוֹ
אַרְבָּעִים יוֹם כִּי כֵן יִמְלְאוּ יְמֵי הַחֲנֻטִים
וַיִּבְכּוּ אֹתוֹ מִצְרַיִם שִׁבְעִים יוֹם׃ 4 וַיַּעַבְרוּ
יְמֵי בְכִיתוֹ וַיְדַבֵּר יוֹסֵף אֶל־בֵּית פַּרְעֹה
לֵאמֹר אִם־נָא מָצָאתִי חֵן בְּעֵינֵיכֶם דַּבְּרוּ־
נָא בְּאָזְנֵי פַרְעֹה לֵאמֹר׃ 5 אָבִי הִשְׁבִּיעַנִי
לֵאמֹר הִנֵּה אָנֹכִי מֵת בְּקִבְרִי אֲשֶׁר כָּרִיתִי
לִי בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנַעַן שָׁמָּה תִּקְבְּרֵנִי וְעַתָּה
אֶעֱלֶה־נָּא וְאֶקְבְּרָה אֶת־אָבִי וְאָשׁוּבָה׃
6 וַיֹּאמֶר פַּרְעֹה עֲלֵה וּקְבֹר אֶת־אָבִיךָ
כַּאֲשֶׁר הִשְׁבִּיעֶךָ׃
7 וַיַּעַל יוֹסֵף לִקְבֹּר אֶת־אָבִיו וַיַּעֲלוּ אִתּוֹ
כָּל־עַבְדֵי פַרְעֹה זִקְנֵי בֵיתוֹ וְכֹל זִקְנֵי
אֶרֶץ־מִצְרָיִם׃ 8 וְכֹל בֵּית יוֹסֵף וְאֶחָיו וּבֵית
אָבִיו רַק טַפָּם וְצֹאנָם וּבְקָרָם עָזְבוּ בְּאֶרֶץ
גֹּשֶׁן׃ 9 וַיַּעַל עִמּוֹ גַּם־רֶכֶב גַּם־פָּרָשִׁים וַיְהִי
הַמַּחֲנֶה כָּבֵד מְאֹד׃

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ Why are we told that "their children, their flocks, and their herds were left in the region of Goshen" (v. 8)? Did we expect the flocks and herds to attend Jacob's funeral?

RASHI **3 It required forty days.** Literally, "forty days were fulfilled for him," the full complement required for embalming. **The Egyptians bewailed him seventy days.** The 40 days required for the embalming, and afterward the standard 30 days of mourning. For Jacob had brought great blessing to Egypt—the famine had ended on his account, and the waters of the Nile were blessed as well. **[V]**

5 Which I made ready for myself. Literally, "which I have dug for myself" (compare OJPS), just as this verb is used in "When a man opens a pit, or *digs* a pit" (Exod. 21:33). But the midrash that Jacob had "acquired" the grave from Esau also fits the language of the text. As R. Akiva explains, in commercial ports they turn *mekhirah* ("selling") into the shorthand *kirah*—which is exactly the verb used here. A further midrash relates our verb to the rabbinic word *k'ri* ("pile"). Jacob took all the silver and gold that he had brought from Laban's house and put it into a big pile. Then he said to Esau, "Take all this for your portion in the cave."

6 As he made you promise on oath. Had he not made you promise on oath, I would not have let you. — But Pharaoh was afraid to tell Joseph to violate his oath. For Joseph might respond, "Fine. Then I will also break the oath I swore to *you* not to reveal that, in addition to the 70 languages that both you and I know, I also know the holy tongue—which you do *not* know." (See B. Sot. 36b.)

[V] See Rashi's comment to 47:10.

RASHBAM **5 Then I shall return.** Let him not worry that I am leaving his country for good.

9 Chariots, too, and horsemen went up with him. Rather, "He brought chariots, too, and horsemen up with him." The verb is Hiphil, not Qal, as in "he *offered* burnt offerings *up* on the altar" (8:20).

IBN EZRA **5 Which I made ready.** Rather, "which I dug for myself." Compare OJPS, and see the use of the same verb in "When a man . . . *digs* a pit" (Exod. 21:33).

7 And with him went up all the officials of Pharaoh. Rather, "all the *servants* of Pharaoh" (OJPS)—and all the people in Egypt except for Joseph were servants of Pharaoh.

KIMHI **3 Seventy days.** Counting the 30 days that are spent in mourning any great man, as we find with Aaron and Moses. In their case, however, the 30 days came after the burial, whereas in Jacob's case they came before the burial, since he was embalmed.

4 Joseph spoke to Pharaoh's court. To the elders, being embarrassed to speak to Pharaoh about a personal matter.

5 The grave which I made ready for myself. Many people do dig their own graves before they die.

8 Joseph's household. His sons and grandsons. **His brothers, and his father's household.** The grown sons of his brothers.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **3 The Egyptians bewailed him seventy days.** Another reading: The "seventy persons . . . belonging to Jacob" in Egypt (see 46:26–27) each bewailed him for one day (Hizkuni). The text literally reads, "They bewailed him—Egypt—seventy days," perhaps to be read as "they"—the men of his own household—"bewailed him *in* Egypt for 70 days." It is implausible that all the Egyptians would mourn for Jacob (Abarbanel).

4 Do me this favor, and lay this appeal before Pharaoh. Joseph himself could not go; as Esther 4:2 reminds us, "one cannot enter the palace gate wearing sackcloth" (Abarbanel).

7 With him went up all the officials of Pharaoh, the senior members of his court, and all of Egypt's dignitaries. They were not commanded to do so, but went to honor Joseph, who was considered wise by the sages of that generation (Sforno).

9 Chariots, too, and horsemen went up with him. Due to his fear that Esau would contest the cave (Abarbanel). The armed forces respected him for his military skill (Sforno).

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NJPS [10]When they came to Goren ha-Atad, which is beyond the Jordan, they held there a very great and solemn lamentation; and he observed a mourning period of seven days for his father. [11]And when the Canaanite inhabitants of the land saw the mourning at Goren ha-Atad, they said, "This is a solemn mourning on the part of the Egyptians." That is why it was named Abel-mizraim, which is beyond the Jordan. [12]Thus his sons did for him as he had instructed them. [13]His sons carried him to the land of Canaan, and buried him in the cave of the field of Machpelah, the field near Mamre, which Abraham had bought for a burial site from Ephron the Hittite. [14]After burying his father, Joseph returned to Egypt, he and his brothers and all who had gone up with him to bury his father.

[15]When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "What if Joseph

OJPS [10]And they came to the threshing-floor of Atad, which is beyond the Jordan, and there they wailed with a very great and sore wailing; and he made a mourning for his father seven days. [11]And when the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, saw the mourning in the floor of Atad, they said: "This is a grievous mourning to the Egyptians." Wherefore the name of it was called Abel-mizraim, which is beyond the Jordan. [12]And his sons did unto him according as he commanded them. [13]For his sons carried him into the land of Canaan, and buried him in the cave of the field of Machpelah, which Abraham bought with the field, for a possession of a burying-place, of Ephron the Hittite, in front of Mamre. [14]And Joseph returned into Egypt, he, and his brethren, and all that went up with him to bury his father, after he had buried his father.

[15]And when Joseph's brethren saw that their father was dead, they said: "It may be

10 וַיָּבֹאוּ עַד־גֹּרֶן הָאָטָד אֲשֶׁר בְּעֵבֶר הַיַּרְדֵּן
וַיִּסְפְּדוּ־שָׁם מִסְפֵּד גָּדוֹל וְכָבֵד מְאֹד וַיַּעַשׂ
לְאָבִיו אֵבֶל שִׁבְעַת יָמִים׃ 11 וַיַּרְא יוֹשֵׁב
הָאָרֶץ הַכְּנַעֲנִי אֶת־הָאֵבֶל בְּגֹרֶן הָאָטָד
וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵבֶל־כָּבֵד זֶה לְמִצְרָיִם עַל־כֵּן
קָרָא שְׁמָהּ אָבֵל מִצְרַיִם אֲשֶׁר בְּעֵבֶר
הַיַּרְדֵּן׃ 12 וַיַּעֲשׂוּ בָנָיו לוֹ כֵּן כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּם׃
13 וַיִּשְׂאוּ אֹתוֹ בָנָיו אַרְצָה כְּנַעַן וַיִּקְבְּרוּ
אֹתוֹ בִּמְעָרַת שְׂדֵה הַמַּכְפֵּלָה אֲשֶׁר קָנָה
אַבְרָהָם אֶת־הַשָּׂדֶה לַאֲחֻזַּת־קֶבֶר מֵאֵת
עֶפְרֹן הַחִתִּי עַל־פְּנֵי מַמְרֵא׃ 14 וַיָּשָׁב יוֹסֵף
מִצְרַיְמָה הוּא וְאֶחָיו וְכָל־הָעֹלִים אִתּוֹ
לִקְבֹּר אֶת־אָבִיו אַחֲרֵי קָבְרוֹ אֶת־אָבִיו׃
15 וַיִּרְאוּ אֲחֵי־יוֹסֵף כִּי־מֵת אֲבִיהֶם
וַיֹּאמְרוּ לוּ יִשְׂטְמֵנוּ יוֹסֵף וְהָשֵׁב יָשִׁיב לָנוּ

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ✦ What is the point of telling us that the Canaanite inhabitants said, "This is a solemn mourning on the part of the Egyptians" (v. 11)?

RASHI **10 Goren Ha-atad.** A threshing floor (*goren*) surrounded by thornbushes (*atad*). But our Sages connect the name to this event: All the kings of Canaan and princes of Ishmael came prepared to battle them. But when they saw Joseph's crown hanging on Jacob's coffin, they all stopped and hung their own crowns on it too. They surrounded it with crowns as a threshing floor surrounded by thornbushes is protected as if by a fence of brambles.

12 Thus his sons did for him as he had instructed them. As described in what follows.

13 His sons carried him. But not his grandsons. For he had instructed them, "Let no Egyptian carry my bier, nor any of the children borne to you by Canaanite women— **[W]** only you yourselves." He further assigned them their places: three on the east and so forth for all four sides, exactly as they would be stationed with their banners around the Tent of Meeting. Levi did not carry his father, for he would in the future carry the Ark; **[X]** Joseph could not carry it, for he was a king. So Manasseh and Ephraim replaced them. This is the meaning of "each with his standard, under the signs of their ancestral house" (Num. 2:2)—the signs conveyed to them by their father Jacob when he told them how to carry his bier.

14 He and his brothers and all who had gone up with him. Here, on their return, the text put the brothers ahead of the Egyptians who had gone up; but when they first went the Egyptians were listed ahead of the brothers (see vv. 7–8). Seeing the respect with which the kings of Canaan treated Jacob (by hanging their crowns on his coffin), the Egyptians treated Jacob's sons with respect as well.

15 When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead. How did they "see" that their father was dead? From Joseph's behavior. They were accustomed to dine with him at Joseph's table, where Joseph invited them out of respect for his father. When Jacob

[W] See Nahmanides' comment to 38:2. **[X]** "Ark" and "coffin" are the same word in Hebrew.

RASHBAM **11 The Canaanite inhabitants of the land.** The slightly confusing Hebrew text means: "the Canaanites, who were the inhabitants of the land."

IBN EZRA **10 He observed a mourning period of seven days for his father.** But not until after they buried him, as our tradition says.

12 Thus his sons did for him as he had instructed them. That is, they brought him up and buried him in the place he instructed them to.

15 What if Joseph still bears a grudge against us? NJPS translates correctly. Compare "Esau *harbored a grudge* against Jacob" (27:41). "What if" does have other senses elsewhere in the Bible.

KIMHI **13 His sons carried him to the land of Canaan.** Three on each side of the bier, they carried him on their shoulders all the way from Egypt to the cave.

NAHMANIDES **50:14 After burying his father, Joseph returned to Egypt, he and his brothers and all who had gone up with him to bury his father.** So none of them died either in the fighting with Esau or on the journey. The merit of Jacob, the prophet, and the merit of Joseph himself stood them in good stead.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **10 He observed a mourning period of seven days for his father.** Some explain that the chiefs of Esau, the chieftains of Ishmael, and the sons of Keturah all came to pay their respects. The custom is that, when a new relative shows up, the mourning begins all over again (Hizkuni).

11 When the Canaanite inhabitants of the land saw the mourning at Goren ha-Atad. A reference to Sihon and Og, who are called Canaanites though they lived on the east bank of the river; see Rashi's comment to Deut. 18:2 (Hizkuni). **Which is beyond the Jordan.** Goren ha-Atad was in Canaan, which was "beyond the Jordan" from the east-bank perspective of Sihon and Og (Hizkuni).

15 What if Joseph still bears a grudge against us? Rather, "if only Joseph would still bear a grudge against us." A grudge is hatred that is not openly revealed; they were afraid that now he would display his hatred openly. "What if," as Rashi explains, certainly fits the context well—if only we could find that *lu* has that meaning anywhere in the Bible (Bekhor Shor). On the way back from burying his

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NJPS still bears a grudge against us and pays us back for all the wrong that we did him!" [16]So they sent this message to Joseph, "Before his death your father left this instruction: [17]So shall you say to Joseph, 'Forgive, I urge you, the offense and guilt of your brothers who treated you so harshly.' Therefore, please forgive the offense of the servants of the God of your father." And Joseph was in tears as they spoke to him.

[18]His brothers went to him themselves, flung themselves before him, and said, "We are prepared to be your slaves." [19]But Joseph said to them, "Have no fear! Am I a substitute for God? [20]Besides, although you intended me harm, God intended it for good, so as to bring about the present

אֵת כָּל־הָרָעָה אֲשֶׁר גָּמָלְנוּ אֹתוֹ׃ 16 וַיְצַוּוּ
אֶל־יוֹסֵף לֵאמֹר אָבִיךָ צִוָּה לִפְנֵי מוֹתוֹ
לֵאמֹר׃ 17 כֹּה־תֹאמְרוּ לְיוֹסֵף אָנָּא שָׂא
נָא פֶּשַׁע אַחֶיךָ וְחַטָּאתָם כִּי־רָעָה גְמָלוּךָ
וְעַתָּה שָׂא נָא לְפֶשַׁע עַבְדֵי אֱלֹהֵי אָבִיךָ
וַיֵּבְךְּ יוֹסֵף בְּדַבְּרָם אֵלָיו׃
18 וַיֵּלְכוּ גַּם־אֶחָיו וַיִּפְּלוּ לְפָנָיו וַיֹּאמְרוּ
הִנֶּנּוּ לְךָ לַעֲבָדִים׃ 19 וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם יוֹסֵף
אַל־תִּירָאוּ כִּי הֲתַחַת אֱלֹהִים אָנִי׃
20 וְאַתֶּם חֲשַׁבְתֶּם עָלַי רָעָה אֱלֹהִים
חֲשָׁבָהּ לְטֹבָה לְמַעַן עֲשֹׂה כַּיּוֹם הַזֶּה

OJPS that Joseph will hate us, and will fully requite us all the evil which we did unto him." [16]And they sent a message unto Joseph, saying: "Thy father did command before he died, saying: [17]So shall ye say unto Joseph: Forgive, I pray thee now, the transgression of thy brethren, and their sin, for that they did unto thee evil. And now, we pray thee, forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of thy father." And Joseph wept when they spoke unto him.

[18]And his brethren also went and fell down before his face; and they said: "Behold, we are thy bondmen." [19]And Joseph said unto them: "Fear not; for am I in the place of God? [20]And as for you, ye meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save

RASHI died, he stopped inviting them. **What if Joseph still bears a grudge against us?** The Hebrew *lu* has a number of different meanings. It regularly means "if only" (e.g., 23:13, Num. 14:2). But here, uniquely, it means "perhaps, what if," which is normally expressed by *ulai*.

16 So they sent this message to Joseph. Literally, "they commanded [someone] to Joseph." For another example of this use of the verb, compare Exod. 6:13, where "the LORD spoke to both Moses and Aaron and commanded them to the Israelites"—that is, commanded them to be His messengers to the Israelites. Here too the brothers commanded others to be their messengers to tell this to Joseph. And whom did they command to do this? The sons of Bilhah, who were always in Joseph's company: "Joseph tended the flocks with his brothers, as a helper to the sons of his father's wives Bilhah" (37:2). **[Y] Your father left this instruction.** For the sake of family peace, they tell a white lie. Jacob left no such instruction, for he was not suspicious of Joseph.

17 Please forgive the offense of the servants of the God of your father. Your father has died, but his God lives on, and they are His servants.

18 His brothers went to him themselves. In addition to the messengers they had sent.

19 Am I a substitute for God? Am I in God's place? Even if I wanted to do you harm, I couldn't possibly do so. When all of you intended me harm, the Holy One intended it for good. So how could I alone do all of you any harm?

RASHBAM **16 So they sent this message to Joseph.** They gave strict "instructions" (as the Hebrew really says) to some trusted intimates of theirs.

20 God intended it for good. The Holy One caused you to do it. You did not sin against me, for the Holy One arranged it for your own good.

IBN EZRA **17 I urge you.** More precisely, "I beg you."

19 Am I a substitute for God? Saadia explains: "Am I in the place of God [OJPS], that you fall on your faces before me and say, 'We are your slaves'?"

20 So as to bring about. More precisely, "to do"—using the infinitive absolute form of the verb.

[Y] That verse continues "and Zilpah." It is not clear why the midrash cited by Rashi omits her sons.

KIMHI **16 So they sent this message to Joseph.** Literally, "they instructed [someone to go] to Joseph"—the elders of Pharaoh's house, or of the city.

17 Forgive, I urge you, the offense and guilt of your brothers. Jacob actually had said this to Joseph before he died, and Joseph did so. But Jacob thought that Joseph might have forgiven them only out of obedience to his father, and that he might renege after Jacob died. So he either told the brothers to say this, or they invented it knowing that Jacob had meant for Joseph to forgive them wholeheartedly. **The servants of the God of your father.** Even if they were not your brothers, they are your coreligionists, and you should love and forgive them on that basis. **And Joseph was in tears as they spoke to him.** The elders whom the brothers had sent to him.

19 Am I a substitute for God? Even if I wanted to harm you, how could I?

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS father, Joseph had passed the pit into which his brothers had cast him, and had recited, "Blessed are You, O Lord our God, king of the universe, who performed miracles for me in this place"—and his brothers heard him saying it (Hizkuni). **And pays us back for all the wrong that we did him.** Let's hope he will repay us for the "wrong" we did him—making him the second-highest-ranking person in Egypt—by "wronging" us similarly and giving us high rank (Abarbanel).

16 So they sent this message to Joseph. Apparently after the burial of Jacob, while they were all still in Canaan. They wanted to know his intentions. If his intentions were evil, they would simply stay in Canaan and not return to Egypt (Abarbanel).

17 Forgive, I urge you. The word *anna* is one of just five other words with two punctuation marks (Masorah).

18 His brothers went to him themselves. Once their messengers saw that "Joseph was in tears," the brothers realized that he felt compassionate toward them and they hurried over (Bekhor Shor). **Flung themselves before him.** So he would forgive them while he was still in a merciful mood (Bekhor Shor).

19 Have no fear! Not only will I do you no harm, I will actually treat you well (Bekhor Shor).

20 Although you intended me harm. They had mistakenly thought he intended to kill them—and if they had been correct, what they did was perfectly justified (Sforno). **God intended it for good.** Rather, "God planned [that you make this mistake] for a good purpose" (Sforno).

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NJPS result—the survival of many people. 21And so, fear not. I will sustain you and your children." Thus he reassured them, speaking kindly to them.

22So Joseph and his father's household remained in Egypt. Joseph lived one hundred and ten years. 23Joseph lived to see children of the third generation of Ephraim; the children of Machir son of Manasseh were likewise born upon Joseph's knees. 24At length, Joseph said to his brothers, "I am about to die. God will surely take notice of you and bring you up from this land to the land that He promised on oath to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob." 25So Joseph made the sons of Israel swear, saying, "When God has taken notice of you, you shall carry up my bones from here."

OJPS much people alive. 21Now therefore fear ye not; I will sustain you, and your little ones." And he comforted them, and spoke kindly unto them.

22And Joseph dwelt in Egypt, he, and his father's house; and Joseph lived a hundred and ten years. 23And Joseph saw Ephraim's children of the third generation; the children also of Machir the son of Manasseh were born upon Joseph's knees. 24And Joseph said unto his brethren: "I die; but God will surely remember you, and bring you up out of this land unto the land which He swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob." 25And Joseph took an oath of the children of Israel, saying: "God will surely remember you, and ye shall carry up my bones from hence."

לְהַחֲיֹת עַם־רָב׃ 21 וְעַתָּה אַל־תִּירָאוּ ✦ פסק
אָנֹכִי אֲכַלְכֵּל אֶתְכֶם וְאֶת־טַפְּכֶם וַיְנַחֵם
אוֹתָם וַיְדַבֵּר עַל־לִבָּם׃
22 וַיֵּשֶׁב יוֹסֵף בְּמִצְרַיִם הוּא וּבֵית אָבִיו
וַיְחִי יוֹסֵף מֵאָה וָעֶשֶׂר שָׁנִים׃ 23 וַיַּרְא ✦ פסק
יוֹסֵף לְאֶפְרַיִם בְּנֵי שִׁלֵּשִׁים* גַּם בְּנֵי מָכִיר
בֶּן־מְנַשֶּׁה יֻלְּדוּ עַל־בִּרְכֵּי יוֹסֵף׃ 24 וַיֹּאמֶר
יוֹסֵף אֶל־אֶחָיו אָנֹכִי מֵת וֵאלֹהִים פָּקֹד
יִפְקֹד אֶתְכֶם וְהֶעֱלָה אֶתְכֶם מִן־הָאָרֶץ
הַזֹּאת אֶל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע לְאַבְרָהָם
לְיִצְחָק וּלְיַעֲקֹב׃ 25 וַיַּשְׁבַּע יוֹסֵף אֶת־בְּנֵי
יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר פָּקֹד יִפְקֹד אֱלֹהִים אֶתְכֶם
וְהַעֲלִתֶם אֶת־עַצְמֹתַי מִזֶּה׃

v. 23. ם׳ רבתי לפי מהדורת לעטעריס

RASHI **21 Speaking kindly to them.** Literally, "speaking to their heart"—words that their hearts could accept. "Before you came down here, people were grumbling that I was a slave. But through you it was revealed that I am a free man. If I were to kill you, what would people say? 'He saw a bunch of fine young men and decided to use them to elevate his own stature. First he said, "They are my brothers," then he killed them! Is there such a thing as a man who kills his own brothers?'" Another version of what he said: "If 10 lamps could not extinguish one lamp, how could a single lamp extinguish 10?"

23 The children of Machir son of Manasseh were likewise born upon Joseph's knees. Rather, as Onkelos translates, Joseph "brought them up" between his knees.

25 When God has taken notice of you. Moses was given this same phrase as a sign to the Israelites that the Lord had sent him: "Go and assemble the elders of Israel and say to them: the LORD . . . has appeared to me and said, 'I have *taken note* of you'" (Exod. 3:16).

KIMHI **23 Joseph lived to see children of the third generation of Ephraim.** He saw them born. **The children of Machir son of Manasseh were likewise born upon Joseph's knees.** They were actually raised by Joseph.

RASHBAM **23 The children of Machir son of Manasseh.** These are only the second generation; Ephraim increased more prolifically, just as Jacob had said: "His younger brother shall be greater than he, and his offspring shall be plentiful enough for nations" (48:19).

24 I am about to die. Though our verse does not say so, v. 25 makes clear that Joseph made them swear to carry up his bones with them.

IBN EZRA **23 Children of the third generation.** The children of the third generation are of course themselves the fourth generation. **Born upon Joseph's knees.** The verb is a Pual—passive of the Piel, not the Qal. They were "brought up" on Joseph's knees.

NAHMANIDES **24 I am about to die.** His brothers were alive and in good health; they lived longer than he did, as you can see with Levi. **[K]**

25 So Joseph made the sons of Israel swear. Seeing that his brothers were aged, he made their sons and all of his father's household swear that everyone would make his sons take this same oath up until the time for the redemption. For they all knew about the exile. **When God has taken notice of you, you shall carry up my bones from here.** Joseph did not instruct them to bury him there at once. He knew the palace would not permit that, since his presence was a great honor to them. Moreover, if his brothers and all of his father's household accompanied him to Canaan for burial, the locals would steal everything they had. And it would be dishonorable for others to take him there to bury him.

This completes the book of Genesis, the story of the Patriarchs, to "recount things that happened" (Isa. 48:3) and "foretell new things ere they sprout up" (Isa. 42:9). All praise to the Creator, who "draws mysteries out of the darkness and brings obscurities to light" (Job 12:22), "Him who rides the clouds" (Ps. 68:5), who leads me in "the way of righteousness" (Prov. 8:20).

[K] According to Seder Olam, he was the last of the brothers to die.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **21 I will sustain you and your children.** So they returned to Egypt with him (Abarbanel).

22 So Joseph and his father's household remained in Egypt. Really they "settled" in Egypt for a second time (the first being 47:11); they would not have settled there permanently if Joseph had not promised to take care of them (Abarbanel).

23 Joseph lived to see children of the third generation of Ephraim; the children of Machir son of Manasseh were likewise born upon Joseph's knees. These are the "progeny born to you" of 48:6 (Abarbanel).

25 So Joseph made the sons of Israel swear. When God has taken notice of you, you shall carry up my bones from here. "You" is in the plural. He knew that all the tribes would go back up to the land. But because he was a great man he knew the Egyptians would give him a highly honored burial. So he was afraid the others would leave him there, thinking, "He is already honorably buried" (Bekhor Shor).

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NJPS [26]Joseph died at the age of one hundred and ten years; and he was embalmed and placed in a coffin in Egypt.

OJPS [26]So Joseph died, being a hundred and ten years old. And they embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt.

[26] וַיָּמָת יוֹסֵף בֶּן־מֵאָה וָעֶשֶׂר שָׁנִים וַיְחַנְּטוּ
אֹתוֹ וַיִּישֶׂם בָּאָרוֹן בְּמִצְרָיִם׃*

v. 26. למדינחאי סכום הפסוקים של הספר 1,534
וחציו 27.40

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS 26 Joseph died at the age of one hundred and ten years. If you do the numbers, you will see that the Israelites lived peacefully in Egypt without being enslaved for 71 years during Joseph's life, a further 22 years until the death of Levi, and all the days of Levi's son Kohath, who lived for 127 years after the death of his father, for a total of 220 years. They were enslaved for 130 years during the life of Amram and 80 years during the life of Moses, for a total of 210. Counting the 9 years he ruled before the family moved down to Egypt, Joseph stayed in power in Egypt for a full 80 years—a reign unmatched, as far as I can tell, in human history (Abarbanel). **He was embalmed and placed in a coffin in Egypt.** But he was not buried, since they were eventually to bring him back up to the land. Note, however, that correctly he was placed in "the" coffin that they had chosen and prepared for him while he was alive, and that none of the Patriarchs were placed in a coffin except Joseph, who was to be transported that way (Hizkuni). I think that since "the couch was too short" (Isa. 28:20) for all the brothers and their wives to be buried in the cave, Joseph did not want to exalt himself over the rest of them by claiming a place there (Abarbanel). He was placed in "the" coffin where the embalming was done—it was not buried in the ground but left so that they would know about it when the time came to take him back up to Egypt (Sforno).

RASHBAM 26 He was embalmed. A Hophal; for similar forms, see 38:25 and Ezek. 47:8. **In a coffin.** Which was buried in the ground.

IBN EZRA 26 He was embalmed. Literally, "they embalmed him" (OJPS)—the physicians did. **And placed.** Again, this is literally "and [someone] placed him." The root of the verb is ישם; note the same vowel pattern as in "the LORD God *formed* man" (2:7). Jonah ibn Janah considers this a passive of שים, with the vowel *i* replacing the standard *u*, but I find that implausible. **In a coffin.** Literally, "in *the* coffin" he had prepared for himself.

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GLOSSARY

Account of Creation – the esoteric understanding of Genesis 1 (*Ma'aseh Bereshit*), corresponding to the Account of the Chariot in Ezekiel 1 (*Ma'aseh Merkavah*)

Alphabet of R. Machir – a lost 11th-c. talmudic dictionary by Machir b. Judah, younger brother of Rabbenu Gershom, the "Light of the Exile," who was the teacher of Rashi's teachers

apocopated – a word from a ל״ה root that has dropped the final ה

argument *a fortiori* – known in rabbinic literature as a "kal va-ḥomer," this is the logical suggestion that, since X is known to be true for a certain situation, it must obviously be true for a comparable situation where the same logic is even stronger

Baraita de-Niddah – a work of unknown provenance that rules more strictly than the Babylonian Talmud about the laws of ritual purity with regard to menstruation

Baraita of 32 Rules – a work on biblical interpretation, of uncertain first-millennium date

Baraita of R. Eliezer b. R. Yose the Galilean – another name for the *Baraita of 32 Rules*

The Book of the Wars of Jacob's Sons – a medieval midrash that ultimately derives from an unknown text of the Dead Sea Scrolls era via a Greek or Latin translation

The Book of the Wars of the LORD – Gersonides' major work of Jewish philosophy

cohortative – a verb form indicating "let me" or "let us"

conjugation – a Hebrew verb pattern; see Special Topics, "Biblical Hebrew"

dagesh – the dot that is occasionally found in Hebrew letters

Eighteen Benedictions – the Amidah, the central section of each Jewish prayer service, recited three times daily

gematria – calculations based on the numerical values of the Hebrew letters in a word or phrase

geminate – a root in which the second letter is "twinned," being used as the third letter of the root as well (e.g., SBB, סבב)

Genesis Rabbah – a 5th-c. exegetical midrash from the land of Israel

halakhah – Jewish law; literally, "going," or (more colloquially) "the Way"

hapax legomenon – a word that occurs only once in the Bible

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Josippon – a Hebrew historical narrative from 10th-c. Italy

Karaites – Jews who rejected the rabbinic Oral Law and claimed to base their way of life on the Torah alone

Lekah Tov – a commentary on the Pentateuch and the Five Scrolls contemporary with Rashbam

mappiq – the dot that marks a final ה as a consonant

Masorah Magna – a more detailed and more comprehensive explanation of the traditions used by the Masoretes (see the next entry)

masoretic – from the Hebrew word *masorah* ("tradition"), referring to the text of the Hebrew Bible as fixed by the "Masoretes," textual scholars of the 8th–11th centuries C.E.

metathesis – the linguistic phenomenon of switching two consonants, e.g., "aks" for "ask"

Mishneh Torah – the law code written by Maimonides

Noahides – a name for non-Jews that refers to their obligation to observe seven divine commandments

parashah – one of the 54 sections into which the Pentateuch is divided, to be read week by week throughout the year

pasek – a vertical line between words that would otherwise be read together

Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer – a retelling of the Torah that originated in the Muslim period, perhaps in the 8th c.

radical – one of the three letters that make up the "roots" from which most Hebrew words derive

Sanctification of the Moon – a blessing recited, generally after the end of the Sabbath, upon seeing the moon for the first time each month

Seder Olam – a work relating the chronology of the world from Adam to the Bar Kokhba revolt

Sefer ha-Bahir – a kabbalistic work referred to by Nahmanides as *The Midrash of R. Nehunya b. ha-Kaneh*, a 1st-c. Judean scholar to whom it is attributed

Sefer Mikhlol – a work on Hebrew philology in two parts by David Kimhi: (1) a section on grammar, and (2) a lexicon; part 1 alone is sometimes called *Mikhlol*

Sefer Yetzirah – an enigmatic, mystical-philosophic work most likely dating to the period between the Mishnah and the Babylonian Talmud

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sefirot (sg. *sefirah*) – in Jewish mysticism, the 10 emanations (each associated with a different divine quality) through which the immaterial Infinite God manifests Himself in the material world

Shema – a series of biblical passages introduced by Deut. 6:4, recited during the morning and evening services

sheva – two dots vertically underneath a Hebrew letter, indicating the end of a syllable or the tiny vowel sound called "schwa" in English

shofar – the ram's horn traditionally blown in Jewish ritual leading up to, during, and after the Ten Days of Repentance at the beginning of the month of Tishrei

Sifra – a collection of midrashim, from the time of the Mishnah, on the book of Leviticus

Sifrei – collections of midrashim, from the time of the Mishnah, on the books of Numbers and Deuteronomy

Tanhuma – a homiletic midrash on the Torah from the second half of the first millennium

Targum Jonathan – the "official" Aramaic translation of the Prophets

Tetragrammaton – the four-letter personal name of God, not pronounced by Jews

Tractate Soferim – one of the "minor tractates" of the Talmud, dealing with the rules to be followed by scribes

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NAMES MENTIONED IN THE TEXT

Dunash ibn Tamim, the Easterner – 10th-c. North African grammarian and scholar

(Salomon) Ibn Parhon – 12th-c. Spanish-Italian lexicographer, a student of Ibn Ezra

Jacob b. Eleazar – 12th–13th-c. Spanish poet, grammarian, and philosopher

Jeshua b. Judah – 11th-c. Karaite commentator from Jerusalem

Jonah ibn Janah – 11th-c. Spanish grammarian and lexicographer

Joseph b. Gorion – the presumed author of the *Josippon*, mistakenly identified with Josephus

Joseph Kara – 11th-c. French Bible commentator of the generation between Rashi and Rashbam

Judah Halevi – 12th-c. Spanish poet and philosopher, author of the *Kuzari*; a close friend and perhaps even a relative of Ibn Ezra

Judah ibn Bal'am – 11th-c. Spanish Bible commentator and Hebrew grammarian

Judah ibn Hayyuj – 10th-c. Spanish grammarian

Maimonides – 12th-c. physician, philosopher, and talmudist in Cairo

Mar Hassan – 10th-c. Spanish astronomer

Menahem ibn Saruq – pioneering Hebrew lexicographer, 10th-c. Spain

Moses b. Samuel ha-Cohen Gikatilla – 11th-c. Spanish grammarian

Moses ha-Darshan – an important French scholar who was a contemporary of Rashi

Onkelos – legendary 2nd-c. translator of the Torah into Aramaic

Rabbenu Nissim – 11th-c. North African talmudist, author of the *Megillat Setarim*

Saadia – 10th-c. Ga'on of Sura (though born in Egypt); Bible commentator, philosopher, and enemy of the Karaites

Samuel b. Hophni – 9th–10th-c. head of the talmudic academy of Sura; father-in-law of Hai b. Sherira

Samuel ha-Nagid (Ismail ibn Nagrel'a; 993–1055 or 1056), vizier of Granada, statesman, poet, scholar, and military commander

Sherira Ga'on – 10th-c. Ga'on of Pumbedita, prolific writer of halakhic responsa with an interest in mysticism

Solomon ibn Gabirol – 11th-c. Spanish poet and philosopher

R. Tanhuma – 4th-c. Palestinian rabbi to whom the midrash called Tanhuma is ascribed

Titus – the Roman general (later emperor) who conquered Jerusalem in 70 C.E., during the First Revolt; the conquest is commemorated in the "Arch of Titus" in Rome

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SOURCE TEXTS

The Hebrew texts of the commentators as printed in traditional versions of the Miqra'ot Gedolot are not always the best available texts. They may include mistakes made by the printers or by earlier scribes, as well as comments added by transcribers, super-commentators, and editors. (For example, in one place in the book of Kings, "Rashi" explains something by using a word in Russian.) Despite the freedom I have taken in representing the words of the commentators, I have tried to use the best available texts of their comments. The Miqra'ot Gedolot published by Bar-Ilan University Press (see "Resources for Further Study," below) is currently considered the most reliable edition, being based on comprehensive manuscript research done by the most respected scholars in the field. We were not, however, able to get permission to use it as the source text for this edition (though I consulted it occasionally when difficulties arose). I have therefore relied on the editions of Berliner (for Rashi), Rosin (for Rashbam), Krinsky (for Ibn Ezra), and Chavel (for Nahmanides). The Rashbam material from the middle of his comment to 1:31 through ch. 17 are taken from elsewhere in his Torah commentary and also from the new material assembled on the alhatorah.org website by Hillel Novetsky. Grateful thanks to him for permission to use the material he has worked so hard to collect.

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SPECIAL TOPICS

PESHAT AND DERASH

The commentators whose work is the focus of this book distinguish between two different kinds of biblical interpretation, called by the Hebrew terms *peshat* and *derash*. *Peshat* can be defined as "the straightforward sense of a word, phrase, or verse in its biblical context." It refers, that is, to what the biblical text says "in plain Hebrew." *Derash* is a broader category, but it is the opposite of *peshat* in the sense that it derives meaning from a verse, phrase, word, or sometimes even a single letter *abstracted* from its biblical context. A *derash* interpretation need make no contextual sense.

The major work of Jewish biblical interpretation during the first millennium C.E. was of the *derash* type. Much of it is found in works of rabbinic literature that are referred to as midrash (from the same Hebrew root as the word *derash*). The second millennium began with a flourishing of the study of *peshat*, the contextual meaning of the biblical text. A similar trend is found among Christian exegetes in this period. It is possible that the trend toward *peshat* among rabbinic Jews was given its impetus by the challenges to traditional biblical interpretation from Christians and Karaites—that is, nonrabbinic Jews.

Rashi was to a large extent the pathfinder in this process. In a rare few of his comments, he explicitly describes how he grappled with the dissonance between contextual and non-contextual exegesis (in this volume, see his introductory comments). But Rashi offers many rabbinic interpretations as part of his commentary; it is clear that he found midrash an important source of understanding about the Bible. Unlike works of midrash, however, Rashi's commentary presents only those *derash* interpretations that fit the flow of the biblical text. This focus on context as a defining principle of biblical interpretation is Rashi's great innovation. For Rashi, the straightforward sense of the text does not fully exhaust its meaning, but the two categories of interpretation, *peshat* and *derash*, are not contradictory but complementary.

A conscious and consistent distinction between *peshat* and *derash* (though he does not use the latter term) is, however, found in the work of Rashi's grandson Rashbam. More importantly, Rashbam does not merely differentiate between the two, but restricts himself almost entirely to *peshat* and even defines himself as a *pashtan*, a *peshat* interpreter. Ibn Ezra, Rashbam's contemporary, though he defines his commentary as being based strictly on grammar and on logic, is much more uncomfortable in rejecting or ignoring rabbinic tradition. He will sometimes reject a particular rabbinic tradition as being the opinion of a single Sage and not generally accepted. Alternatively, he may say that logic suggests a particular interpretation, but if the rabbinic opinion is a genuine tradition, it must be accepted. (His "if" implies that he would rather *not* accept it.) Kimhi's attitude to *derash* is more complex; in any case, since his comments here are heavily edited, nothing should be inferred from omissions.

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Nahmanides brings the question full circle, returning to Rashi's method of integrating rabbinic interpretation into a contextual approach. Since he understood the "True" meaning of the text to be a mystical one, the apparent conflict between *peshat* and *derash* interpretations that seemed so strong to Rashbam and Ibn Ezra was of less importance to him. It is in his era that the phrase "the Torah has 70 faces" first becomes current; with it, the first great period of the flourishing of *peshat* interpretation comes to a close.

MEDIEVAL JEWISH PHILOSOPHY

One of the things Ibn Ezra brought with him to the Jews of Christian Europe was the classical philosophic tradition, as it had flourished and developed in the Islamic intellectual world. There, the ideas of Plato and Aristotle had been reinterpreted in the light of a culture that had a scripture and believed in a God who rewarded the observance of strict rules of behavior. Nahmanides, in Christian Spain, was also heir to this tradition.

Because philosophy and science were not yet two separate fields, medieval Jewish philosophy included various ideas that today we would more likely classify as science. Like the ancient Greeks, the medievals understood the material world to be made up of four basic elements: earth, water, fire, and air. Everything in this "sublunar" world was a combination of matter and "form" (in something like the Platonic sense of the word, for example, the essential "table-ness" that allows us to classify certain material objects as tables). Above this sublunar world was that of the "spheres," where the seven planets (sun, moon, Venus, Mercury, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn) and the stars moved. Beyond these spheres in which the heavenly lights move were the immaterial "intelligences," separate from God, which controlled them. All these objects and beings owe their existence to God, who is pure intellect, entirely separated from matter; He is the Prime Mover, their source and their being, just as all numbers both stem from and include the number one. Similar pictures, though varying in important details, underlie the views of Gersonides and Abarbanel. Similarly, human beings have an "intellectual" soul that engages in rational thought as well as an "animal" or "appetitive" soul and a "vegetative" soul.

A notable aspect of these beliefs is the place in the medieval worldview of what today we call astrology. Many of the philosophically inclined commentators accepted the notion that the movements of the heavenly spheres—beings, in their view—determined the fate of people on earth. This view is found in the Talmud as well. But from a religious perspective it was understood that the astrological fates were not inexorable, but could be altered by God at will. God does not disrupt the system (which after all was created by Him), but He does save those who worship Him properly from its ill effects. There is, however, a philosophical debate about whether God knows "particulars" (that is, the precise details of the material world, which are constantly changing) or only "universals" (the unchanging laws by which the universe works).

NAHMANIDES' MYSTICISM

Although the mystical strain in Judaism goes back at least to the beginning of the Common Era, if not before, Jewish mysticism as we know it today dates back to the publication of the

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Zohar in Spain at the end of the 13th century, in the same cultural world as, and very shortly after the death of, Nahmanides. The latter's understanding of the Torah was very heavily shaped by his involvement in the Jewish mystical thought of 13th-century Spain. He therefore supplemented his discussions of the straightforward meaning of the text, and of rabbinic analyses of its content, with an explanation "according to the way of Truth." According to a midrash he cites in the introduction to his comments, the Torah existed before the creation of the world in letters of black fire on white fire. Nahmanides understands the essential text of the Torah to consist of a variety of names of God, including the "Great Name" of 72 letters. The original Torah had no spaces between the letters, permitting it to be read not only as the text whose *peshat* was interpreted by Rashi, but also as a series of divine names and (potentially) in an infinite number of other ways.

It is, however, the multiple divine names in the Torah that seem to be the key to understanding Nahmanides' mystical approach. For him, the single, unique, infinite God somehow manifests Himself in the material world in a number of different forms with different characteristics. Even the different names for God in the "ordinary" text of the Torah indicate (as it were) different "personalities" of God interacting, in different situations, with humanity.

Much of what Nahmanides says on the mystical level is obscure; he clearly believed that this deeper level of understanding was reserved for only a few. (Note his comment to Exod. 33:12, where he says of Ibn Ezra that "His fine intelligence comprehended well . . . But he was not able to understand the Truth, for he had never been taught it and did not acquire it independently by prophecy.") As with Nahmanides' discussions of rabbinic texts, I have not included his more extensive kabbalistic discussions in full. But I have tried to present what *is* included in such a way that, even if the ideas are difficult or obscure, the words are clear.

BIBLICAL HEBREW

Biblical Hebrew is a much more "inflected" language than is English. In English, an adjective never changes its form, but Hebrew adjectives change slightly depending on whether they describe a single person or more than one and whether those being described are male or female. Verbs change too: English has "I am, you are, he is," but Hebrew has a much greater variety of such differences, based not only on singular versus plural and masculine versus feminine, but also on whether the action is being performed by the speaker or "first" person, by the addressee or "second" person, or by some "third" person who is neither of the first two.

As is true for Aramaic, Arabic, and the other Semitic languages to which Hebrew is related, almost all Hebrew words can be conceived of as being "rooted" in a abstract series of consonants—almost always three of them—which refer to a particular concept. (These consonants are referred to as "radicals," from the Latin *radix*, "root.") For example, the "root" KTB has to do with writing, and the Hebrew words that are derived from it, according to the standard rules of the language, all relate to that core meaning: *miktab*, the act of writing; Ketubim, the (sacred) Writings; *katab*, he wrote; *katub*, it is written; and so on. In addition, verbs may fall into a number of different "conjugations" or patterns—*binyanim*, as they are called in Hebrew—where the pattern as a whole modifies the meaning of the root:

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akal (in the simple or Qal pattern) means "he ate," but *he'ekil* (in the causative or Hiphil pattern) means "he caused [someone] to eat," that is, "he fed someone." (The passive of Hiphil—"to be fed"—is Hophal.) The Hitpael pattern, marked by a *t* added to the verb and a *dagesh* in the middle letter of the root, would indicate action that is reflexive or mutual. Niphal is often the passive of the Qal, but at other times bears a meaning closer to Hitpael. Piel is sometimes a more intensive form of the Qal, or changes an intransitive Qal into an active verb. (Pual is the passive equivalent of Piel.) A change in vowels so slight as no longer to be pronounced can completely change the meaning of a word: *zākār* (where both *a* vowels are marked by the *kamatz* symbol) means "masculine" or "male," while *zākar* (where only the first *a* vowel is a *kamatz*) means "he remembered."

The complete verbal system consists of two verb forms indicating when and how an action was performed, the perfect and imperfect (these are the past and future tenses of Modern Hebrew); an imperative or command form; the participle, a verbal adjective describing the person doing the action (this is the present tense of Modern Hebrew); and the infinitive, a verbal noun describing the verb as an action without reference to person or time. Like all Hebrew nouns, this has both absolute and construct forms (the construct form, introduced by the preposition ל ["to"], is the infinitive of Modern Hebrew).

This system was only just beginning to be worked out in the time of Rashi and Rashbam. It was much further advanced among the Jews of the Islamic world from which Ibn Ezra came, because the same work was being done in Arabic, which greatly resembles Hebrew. Ibn Ezra seems to have taken it as part of his mission to set the Jews of Christian Europe straight about Hebrew grammar. I have omitted most of the commentators' grammatical discussions, but have retained such comments when the commentators disagree, or when a precise grammatical detail illuminates a larger point.

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RESOURCES FOR FURTHER STUDY

Edward L. Greenstein, "Medieval Bible Commentators," in *Back to the Sources*: *Reading the Classic Jewish Texts*, ed. Barry Holtz (New York: Summit Books, 1984), 213–242, is an excellent introduction to the topic.

Louis Jacobs, *Jewish Biblical Exegesis* (New York: Behrman House, 1973), has selections from a wide range of commentators along with historical and biographical introductions. Criminally, it's out of print—find it used or in a library.

Those who are ready to use the Hebrew Miqra'ot Gedolot will want to look at two editions. One is *Torat Hayyim*, published by Mossad Ha-Rav Kook (Jerusalem) but widely available in Jewish bookstores in the United States; it has completely reset the comments of the four major commentators in our volume in standard type (as opposed to the "Rashi script" in which they were most commonly found up until now; the comments of Hizkuni and Sforno (and those few comments of Saadia that we still have) are found here as well. The *Ha-Keter* edition of the Miqra'ot Gedolot (published by Bar-Ilan University Press), which also includes the comments of Joseph Bekhor Shor, David Kimhi, and Gersonides, provides new editions of all the commentators, based on the most careful analysis of all available manuscripts that has yet been done. Both *Ha-Keter* and *Torat Hayyim* naturally include Onkelos's Aramaic translation (the "Targum"). There is now an all-Hebrew Artscroll Miqra'ot Gedolot as well, complete with helpful charts and photographs of spotted sheep. Note that Rashbam's commentary (at least) lacks certain comments that the editors felt could not really be by Rashbam (see Marc Shapiro's post http://seforim.blogspot.com/2015/01/artscrolls-response-and-my-comments.html for more detail).

Those who have access to the Bar-Ilan University Online Responsa Project will find there an even wider range of traditional biblical commentators (along with a vast selection of other material). But as of this writing there is also a freely accessible website that has almost two dozen biblical commentators, some with English translation: http://alhatorah.org, the creation of Hillel Novetsky. Our thanks to him for his generous permission to use the newly identified material by Rashbam on the site in this edition.

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Pentateuch with Rashi's Commentary, trans. M. Rosenbaum and A. M. Silbermann in collaboration with A. Blashki and L. Joseph (New York: Hebrew Publishing Co.)

The Metsudah Chumash/Rashi, a new linear translation by Avrohom Davis; Rashi translation by Avrohom Kleinkaufman (Hoboken, NJ: Ktav, 1994–1997)

The Torah: With Rashi's Commentary Translated, Annotated, and Elucidated, by Yisrael Isser Zvi Herczeg et al. (New York: Mesorah Publications, 1994)—also available in a handy pocket-sized edition

RASHBAM

Rashbam's Commentary on Genesis: An Annotated Translation, ed. and trans. Martin I. Lockshin, Jewish Studies 5 (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1989)

Hachut Hameshulash: Commentaries on the Torah by Rabbeinu Chananel, Rabbi Sh'muel ben Meir (Rash'bam), Rabbi David Kimchi (R'dak), Rabbi Ovadiah Seforno, ed. and trans. Eliyahu Munk (New York; Jerusalem: Lambda Publishers, 2003)

IBN EZRA

Ibn Ezra's Commentary on the Pentateuch: Genesis (Bereshit), trans. and annotated H. Norman Strickman and Arthur M. Silver (New York: Menorah, 1988)

KIMHI

Hachut Hameshulash (see under Rashbam)

NAHMANIDES

Ramban (Nahmanides): Commentary on the Torah, trans. and annotated C. Chavel (Brooklyn: Shilo, 1973)

The Torah: With Ramban's Commentary Translated, Annotated, and Elucidated, by Nesanel Kasnett et al. (Mesorah Publications, 2005–2008)